

## TEACHING AND LEARNING INNOVATION IN SWITZERLAND: A SHORT-TERM FACULTY-LED STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

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In this paper, I share my experience conceptualizing, designing, and implementing a short-term faculty-led study abroad program for undergraduate and graduate students. The primary theme of the program was on innovation in Swiss teaching and training practices. The location of the 10-day study abroad program was Lucerne, Switzerland; however, as part of the cultural aspect of the program, other cities in Switzerland and countries were also visited. The design of the study abroad program took approximately two-years. This paper serves to divulge the process followed for the creation of the faculty-led short-term study abroad program, which can aid the design of future study abroad programs with similar themes to other countries or regions of the world. Additionally, the design of this specific study abroad program provides insights into the logistical and creative process that others should consider in the creation of study abroad experiences that provide a balance between cultural and intellectual goals.

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### INTRODUCTION

In the United States, most universities and colleges offer students opportunities that facilitate participation in different types of travel abroad programs. Year- and semester-long study abroad programs include experiences in which a student enrolls in a university abroad as either part of a direct exchange between institutions or through an arrangement with a study abroad service provider. Most believe that study abroad programs require a semester/year-long commitment and are just for language learning (Nguyen, 2017). However, the reality is that the majority of study abroad programs are one to eight weeks in duration (Institute of International Education, 2015) and focus on a variety of educational goals and topics. Short-term faculty-led study abroad programs offer unique, customized learning experiences for a small group of students. In these programs, faculty work with international contacts at other institutions, their office of international programs, and a study abroad service provider to create a program focused on a specific topic or theme.

For me, as a faculty member, the desire to design and implement a short-term faculty-led program abroad came from the benefits I experienced as an undergraduate and graduate student who participated in summer abroad programs through my educational institution. Those experiences were culturally and intellectually transformative.

Another factor that contributed to the design of this program was participation in international professional development opportunities that helped facilitate an understanding of “study abroad experiences” (Romero-Hall, 2017a, 2017b). These experiences helped me understand particular aspects of travel abroad that I should consider when creating a faculty-led program abroad. In this role, I was able to reflect on my experience and how I would want my students to have similar or improved experiences. Additionally, during the faculty exchange experience, I was able to gain access to professional connections at the desire location (Lucerne, Switzerland).

One last factor that encouraged the creation of this short-term program abroad was the support given for

the establishment of new study abroad experiences at my current institution. The logistical support of new study abroad courses is part of an effort to increase internationalization on campus. I am sharing this design case because it is a different kind of design knowledge compared to others that are usually published. Also, I remember that as an instructional design and technology graduate student, study abroad program themes related to educational technology or education were almost non-existent in the institutions, I attended. Perhaps this design case will be of benefit to those interested in creating short-term study abroad programs related to educational technology or similar topics.

## THE CHOICE TO DESIGN A SHORT-TERM FACULTY-LED PROGRAM

### Affordability

Participating in a study abroad, regardless of the length of the program, can be difficult financially. There are several costs associated with travel expenses (i.e., flight, accommodations, meals). There are also fees associated with program activities and university/service provider. Last, depending on the location(s) of the program, there may be an extra cost that the student will incur due to the currency exchange. It can be difficult for students to assemble sufficient funds to participate in study abroad programs. It often requires family support, saving money for long periods, or seeking financial aid. For some students, the cost of a faculty-led short-term study abroad program will be more feasible to assemble compared to semester- or year-long experiences. During the design process, I aimed to be more mindful of the financial burden of study abroad programs; therefore, I strived to create a program that was cost-effective for students. This was primarily done this by arranging flights, accommodations, and activities that will keep cost low without compromising the goals of the program and the overall experience.

### Cultural Mentoring

Research shows that there are more significant benefits to year- and semester-long study abroad programs (Cooker et al., 2018). However, short-term faculty-led study abroad experiences can be of significant benefit to students (Nguyen, 2017); especially, if they involve cultural mentoring. Students that participate in study abroad experiences often encounter an emotional journey, which includes feeling loss, insecure, anxiety, and culture shock (Niehaus et al., 2018). Cultural mentoring by faculty members leading short-term study abroad programs can assist the student through teachable moments to learn more about the host culture. It can also help create an understanding of pre-existing beliefs and values concerning the people, places, food, art, lifestyle, religion, and other elements of the country visited as part of the study abroad program (Niehaus et al., 2018).

## THE LOCATION OF THE PROGRAM

Given my exposure to travel abroad, I was initially attracted to the idea of designing a similar program to a different region and country. However, the initial location selected was labeled as “reconsider travel” by the U.S. Department of State after recurring political issues. This, in turn, prevented the university from authorizing me to pursue a study abroad program in the first country selected. Switzerland, on the other hand, is considered a reasonably safe country to visit and is not part of the travel warning list of the U.S. Department of State. As a bonus, the university does not offer other short-term programs to Switzerland. The design of a short-term study abroad program to this destination represented an expansion of potential international experiences for the students at my institution.

I also had a significant level of comfort with Switzerland as the primary destination of the study abroad program because, in recent years, I had participated in a faculty exchange program to PH Luzern (Romero-Hall, 2017a), as previously noted. I was able to experience the Swiss transportation system, food, culture, and hospitality. During this faculty exchange, I created several professional contacts at various institutions of higher education in Lucerne that could assist me in the design of the short-term faculty-led study abroad program. Having a significant level of familiarity and travel experience with the location of the program was extremely important to me. I knew that if I took students to a different country, that they would feel comfortable knowing that their professor was knowledgeable about the surroundings, the country, and able to serve as a host that would guide them without hesitation.

Switzerland, and specifically Lucerne, also offers a vibrant culture that combines historical sites and beautiful outdoor activities. All of this combined with the current innovative developments and resources in teaching and learning in Swiss education and training (Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research, 2016), which would be the core of the activities, made this a desirable and viable destination for the study abroad program.

Other cities in Switzerland that were also travelled to as part of the program were Zurich and Locarno. The students in the program also enjoyed a daytrip to Colmar, France.

## STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM THEME

The theme of the short-term faculty-led study abroad program described in this paper was “Teaching and Learning Innovation.” You may wonder why this specific theme? As an instructional design instructor, I am often discussing the growing number of ideas, practices, and products that are part of everyday educational experiences that are commonly referred to as “useful innovation” (Carrier, 2017). These innovations can take the form of free-to-use programs, software

applications, philanthropic initiatives, altered traditional educational practices, and teaching philosophies (Carrier, 2017). Understanding innovation in education and training is essential because a) it serves as a way to enhance equity and equality, and b) it allows the education sector to adapt to the societal needs (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016). As an instructor who teaches and researches in the instructional design and technology field, I created this program primarily with the intent to expose students to arrays of innovative teaching and learning practices in a cultural and geographical setting outside the United States (U.S). Different cultures have similar or/ and alternative ways to integrate innovative strategies and technologies in the teaching and learning process (Sulecio de Alvarez & Dickson-Deane, 2018). As stated by Dickson-Deane, Bradshaw, & Asino (2018):

“We cannot accurately understand how best to attend to issues of learning and technology without acknowledging that culture permeates all environments in which learning takes places, and every technology created and implemented reflects and is imbued with aspects of the culture(s) of its creator” (pg. 1).

The understanding of these cultural variations and similarities, even if just from one specific culture or geographical location, can be a very eye-opening experience for U.S. students wanting to familiarize themselves with teaching and learning practices. This experience can give insight into how forward-thinking or traditional are our educational practices in the U.S. (in different settings) in comparison to a different culture. It can help the student answer questions such as: What does innovation in teaching and learning mean for individuals in a different culture? How is “change” in teaching and learning implemented? What role(s) does educational technology and strategies play in this innovative learning spaces?

As previously mentioned in this paper, before the design of this short-term study abroad program, I had the opportunity to travel to Switzerland. During that two-week experience in Switzerland, I was tremendously impressed with ideas, processes, and experiences shared with me in terms of teaching and training practices by colleagues, learners, and institutions in Switzerland. The connection between the theme of the program and the location was a perfect match. Swiss educators take pride in bringing innovative ideas to their practice. For example, one of my Swiss colleagues teaching a graduate-level in-service teacher course in informatics was introducing his learners to programming and coding of robotics. This gave me a sense of the kind of practice that students could be exposed to when participating in the short-term study abroad program to Switzerland.

## THE CONTEXT AND DESIGN PROCESS

To start crafting the study abroad experience, I first drafted the goals and objectives of the program. Writing the goals and objectives of the program, just like other types of instruction, gave me as the designer a clear perspective of what I hope the students would get from the experience. It also helped me to select final activities that would help reach the goals and objectives. In this design, the process was different from traditional instructional design practice in which you first identify the program objectives and then start crafting the learning experience. In a very unorthodox move, as a designer, I was writing program objectives with a specific country and period in mind. I also had, in the back of my head, some of the activities that I experienced while visiting Switzerland in the past, which I thought would be of interest to the participants of the program. When writing the objectives, I put the country, the time frame, and already known activities ahead of the learning objectives.

The main goal of the program was to introduce learners to digital technologies, innovative learning environments, and instructional design practices in Swiss educational and training industries. These industries include government institutions, K-12 educational settings, higher education, private/ corporate organizations, non-governmental organizations, or other sectors. After participating in this experiential learning program, the learners would be able to:

- Explain in their own words the types of innovative learning environments and digital technologies used in Swiss education and training to engage learners
- Establish how the innovative learning environments and digital technologies compare to the education and training practice in the United States
- Synthesize how different industries in Switzerland integrate instructional design practice into education and training
- Understand the challenges and acceptance faced by Swiss educators, trainers, and instructional designers in the design and development of innovative learning environments
- Describe historical and cultural highlights related to Lucerne and Zurich, Switzerland

Since I had these two critical elements of the program clearly defined, I decided that it would be an excellent step to connect with one of my overseas contacts (Mr. Hanspeter Erni, Professor of Informatics at PH Luzern). I knew that with a clear vision of the drafted goals and objectives of the program, he would be able to provide recommendations of education and educational technologies activities in Lucerne. In preparation for the meeting, I shared the drafted goals and objectives. Then, during the meeting, Mr. Erni shared several educational technology research groups (in different institutions of higher education in Lucerne),

activities, and places that I should consider including in the itinerary for the program. Based on his experience, Mr. Erni believed that the talks with the research groups, participation in activities, and visits to the places mentioned would provide an overview of different digital technologies and innovative learning environments use in diverse settings for teaching and learning purposes in Switzerland.

With a generous list of items to include in the itinerary of the program, I contacted the Office of International Programs (OIP) at my institution. I asked how best to proceed with the design of the program. I was hopeful that the study abroad advisors would sit with me and help craft the activities into a study abroad program. Instead, the study abroad advisor recommended that I contacted a study abroad service provider. For the particular country of destination for this program, the study abroad advisor recommended working with CISabroad.

Initial contact with CISabroad started via their website. Faculty members interested in discussing assistance with short-term study abroad programs had to complete an online "contact form" found on the website of the provider. The form requested information about the location(s) of the program, the estimated travel dates, estimated number of students and faculty that will participate in the program,

the number of meals provided by the program, type of expected accommodations, and ideal program cost. Within 24 hours of submitting the contact form, a representative of the service provider contacted me via email to schedule a phone conversation to discuss the program objectives, goals, expectations, services provided, and the types of activities that I would like to have in the itinerary.

During the phone conversation, the representative of CISabroad, we discussed all the information shared in the contact form. Additionally, I shared the activities that I wanted in the program. After our phone conversation, the representative from the service provider followed up with an email that included a formal itinerary with exact information on program inclusions, program support staff and contact information, and program budget. The plan also included day by day activities.

Although I had worked with overseas connections and a study abroad service provider to design a short-term program with a specific theme, goals, and objectives, I still had to obtain institutional approval to have the program recognize as an official travel course sponsored by the institution. Once a year in the Fall semester, my institution accepts travel course proposals. All the work that had been done towards the design of this short-term study abroad

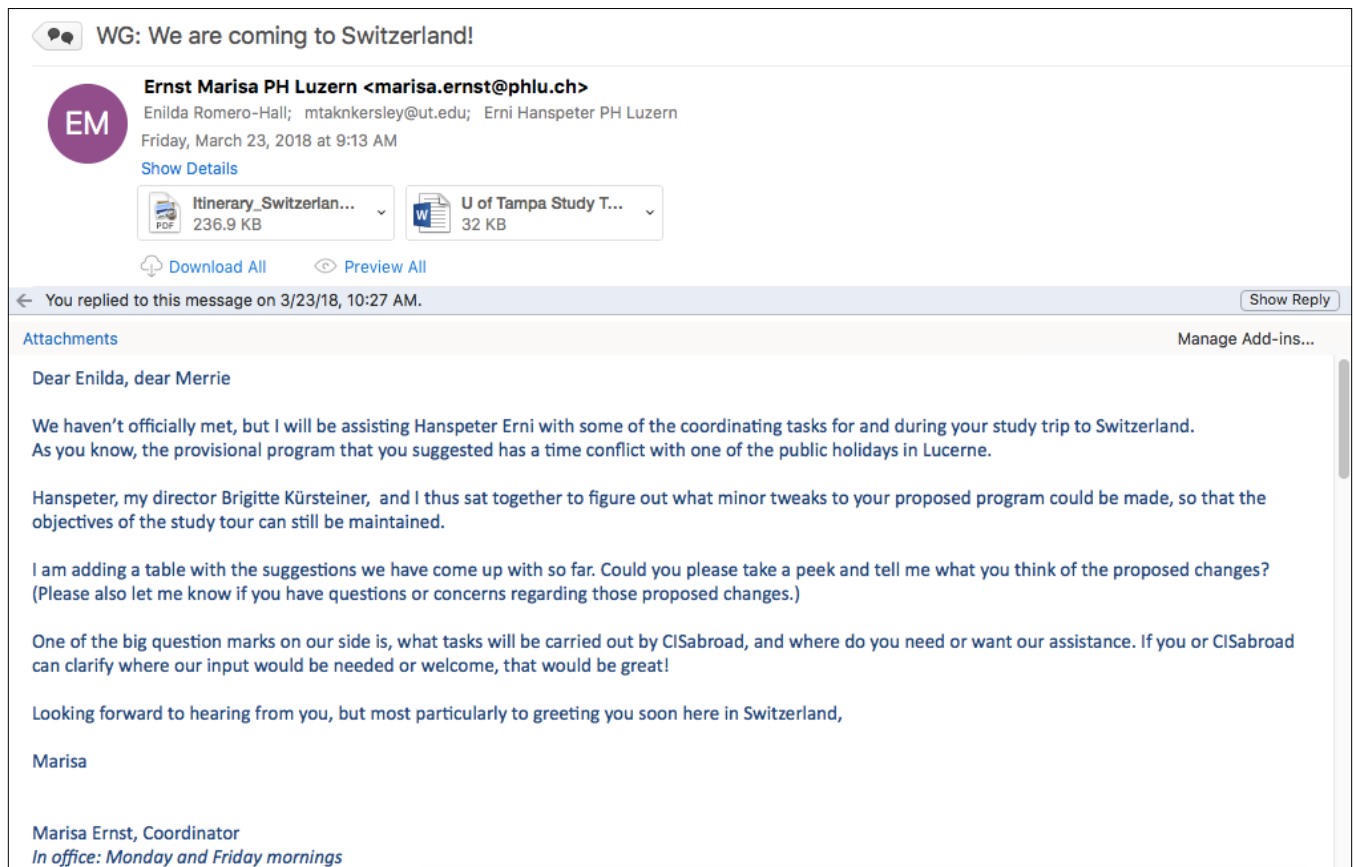


FIGURE 1. Email communication with a staff member from the OIP at PH Luzern.

## Teaching and Learning in Switzerland Study Tour organized by Dr. Enilda Romero-Hall, University of Tampa

Sunday, May 6 – Tuesday, May 15, 2018

Date	Original program	Alternative program proposed	Remarks
Sunday, May 6, 2018	Arrival in Zürich and transfer to Luzern (organized by CISabroad)	no change to original program	HR Erni available to join dinner, if desired
Monday, May 7, 2018	Walking tour of Lucerne (am) –Bourbaki Museum (pm)	<b>Suggestion:</b> <b>ADD: From 15:00 – 18:30, HP Erni teaches "Introduction to Micro-Controllers" as part of lecture "Informatics in Secondary School". First half of session is lecture, second half hands-on practice. Opportunity to meet and collaborate with PHLU students</b> <b>Location: Sentimatt 211/215</b>	
Tuesday, May 8, 2018	Excursion to Lucerne School of Art and Design	<b>Suggestion:</b> <b>ADD: Elementary School visit</b>	
Wednesday, May 9, 2018	AM: Meet with Monica Wyss, HSLU, for guest lecture and discussion PM: Free time for exploring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AM: Visit Rudolf Steiner Schule in Ebikon</li> <li>• PM: Free time (pm)</li> </ul>	
Thursday, May 10, 2018	AM: Meet with Dr. Belliger PM: Visit FabLab Luzern	<b>Holiday in Lucerne!</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Option 1: meet w/HP Erni to experience traditional cortege (approx. 5:00 am – 10:00 am)</li> <li>• Option 2 (can be combined with Option 1) - PM: Verkehrshaus Luzern (museum visit): Expos "Media World" and "I-Factory"</li> <li>• Option 3 (can be combined with Option 1) – PM: local sightseeing (boat trip, Mount Rigi or Pilatus)</li> </ul>	This day is an official holiday in Lucerne. Neither offices, nor shops or banks will be open.
Friday, May 11, 2018	Excursion to a school that focuses on innovative learning (expl. Rudolf Steiner Schule)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ETH Zürich Tour (not yet sure if available)</li> <li>• Walking tour of Zürich, museum visits</li> </ul>	Many people in Lucerne take a long weekend (Thursday – Sunday)
Saturday, May 12, 2018	Excursion to Felsenweg, Bürgenstock	No change to original program	
Sunday, May 13, 2018	Daytrip and educational tour of ETH Zürich	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Tourism Day", for example, trip to Milano, Italy, Geneva, or Zermatt/Gornergrat (<a href="https://www.zermatt.ch/en/Media/Attractions/Gornergrat">https://www.zermatt.ch/en/Media/Attractions/Gornergrat</a>)</li> </ul>	
Monday, May 14, 2018	Free day to explore Lucerne Farewell Dinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AM: FabLab with HP Erni</li> <li>• PM: Meeting with Monika Wyss, HSLU</li> <li>• PM: Meeting with Andrea Belliger, UTE Lucerne</li> </ul>	HP Erni available for Farewell Dinner (after 7:00 pm), if desired

FIGURE 2. Original schedule of program versus alternate schedule proposed.

program, so far, was completed keeping in mind the yearly deadline for submission set by the institution.

With a tentative itinerary, an estimated budget from the service provider, and an understanding of the support provided by the service providers; I then proceeded to request official institutional approval of the program as a "travel course." All the completed documents were submitted to the Director of the OIP and the chair of the International Programs university-wide committee. After a month reviewing the documents submitted, the chair of the International Program university-wide committee emailed approval of the program to me (as coordinator).

Once the approval from the OIP was confirmed, the recruitment for the program started. The OIP staff drafted an official flyer, and the program was included in the study abroad fair held during the Fall semester. The program coordinator and assistant coordinator conducted a great deal of recruitment. This included targeted emails to undergraduate Teacher Preparation majors and Instructional Design graduate students. Two mass emails were sent to all students who were majoring in the College of Social Science, Mathematics, and Education.

After two months of recruitment, the OIP notified me, as the coordinator, that seven students had submitted a deposit to hold their place in the program. The official policy for travel courses at our institution is to have at least ten students as part of any given program; therefore, additional approval to move forward with the program was required. Following the final approval, I notified all students who had deposited that travel arrangements were going to continue, but by a specified deadline they should pay the remaining balances. The OIP set the specific dates for submission of deposits and full payment for the program. As stated in the policy of the OIP, after full payment was received from all of the seven participants: a) flights were purchased using a travel agency that regularly worked with the OIP and b) a check was sent to the service provider (CISabroad) to assist with the arrangements of the program.

The three months in between full payment of the program by the students and the date of departure were very hectic with planning and coordination of activities. During these three months, the service provider, my professional contacts at PH Luzern, the assistant coordinator, and I were dedicated to organizing and confirming events and speakers



(university/school visits were arranged, presentations were scheduled, group meals were confirmed) already included in the initial itinerary.

Knowing that I would be taking students to Switzerland, several colleagues from PH Luzern recommended that I connected and collaborated with the staff at the OIP at PH Luzern to finalize the schedule of the program. As a result, I emailed the Director of the OIP at PH Luzern and asked for any guidance that they could provide. The staff at the OIP at PH Luzern decided that it would be good for me to have one specific contact person (Marisa) to facilitate communication with potential guest speakers (or university/school contacts) and to assist with the coordination of events that were not organized by the service provider (see Figure 1). Working closely with Marisa was of tremendous aid to me since it provided help with the language barrier and cultural nuances. Once Marisa was given the task and introduced to me via email, I shared a copy of the initial itinerary and ideal activities that would be part of the program. Within a few days, Marisa emailed me and shared that various activities would need to be shifted due to a religious holiday that would take place during the dates of the program. Based on this recommendation, she shared an updated itinerary (see Figure 2).

After a review of the updated itinerary, I worked with Marisa to reschedule guest speakers and confirm school/university visits. Marisa helped identify specific individuals (in the different institutions) with whom I should connect. I would then follow up via email to explain the goal of the program and how I aimed for them to participate in the program (a presentation, allow us to do observations in their classrooms, an interactive demonstration, a tour of the facilities). Daily email exchanges were central to having a finalized and confirmed program a week before departure. Once all arrangements were confirmed, a final itinerary was sent to all parties involved: the OIP, CISabroad, PH Luzern, student participants, and faculty leaders.

In total, the process from design to implementation mentioned in the design of this particular study abroad program took approximately two-years.

### Teaching and Learning in Switzerland

Dr. Enilda Romero-Hall

#### Day 1: Sunday - May 6, 2018

Day: Arrive in Zürich, meet with CISabroad On-Site Program Coordinator at the airport, then transfer to accommodations in Lucerne. Take some time to check-in and rest, then embark on a brief walk around the neighborhood to get acquainted with the immediate surroundings.  
Evening: Group Welcome Dinner.

#### Day 2: Monday - May 7, 2018

Morning: Begin the day with a guided, walking tour of Lucerne to get a better sense of the city and its history. Afternoon: Excursion to the Bourbaki Panorama, a museum containing a 19th century painting of the Franco-Prussian War.

#### Day 3: Tuesday - May 8, 2018

Day: Excursion to the Lucerne School of Art and Design for a guest lecture/discussion.

#### Day 4: Wednesday - May 9, 2018

Morning: Meet with Monika Wyss for a guest lecture/discussion. Afternoon: Free time to rest or explore Lucerne.

#### Day 5: Thursday - May 10, 2018

Morning: Meet with Dr. Andrea Belliger Krieger for a guest lecture/discussion. Afternoon: Visit a makerspace in Lucerne for an overview tour of the facilities (FabLab Luzern).

#### Day 6: Friday - May 11, 2018

Day: Excursion to a school that focuses on innovative learning methods in the classroom (Rudolf Steiner School Luzern or similar).

#### Day 7: Saturday - May 12, 2018

Day: Excursion to Felsenweg-Bürgenstock, a cliff walk that leads to the highest point in Lucerne, for stunning views of the region and an opportunity to ride the Hamletschwand Elevator, Europe's highest outdoor elevator.

#### Day 8: Sunday - May 13, 2018

Day: Take a day-trip to Zürich, Switzerland's largest city, to learn about the history of one of Europe's most ambitiously innovative cities. Take a guided, walking tour of the Old Town on arrival, then visit a few of Zürich's most important sites.

#### Day 9: Monday - May 14, 2018

Day: Free day to explore Lucerne independently before the program ends. Evening: Group Farewell Dinner.

#### Day 10: Tuesday - May 15

Day: Check out of accommodations and transfer to the airport for flights home.

**FIGURE 3.** The final schedule for "The Teaching and Learning Innovation in Switzerland.

## THE FINAL PROGRAM

The final program, after revisions, consisted of a combination of activities that would help achieve the program goal and objectives. Several cultural activities allowed the study abroad participants to gain a sense of the Swiss culture, the diversity of the people, different kinds of geography in the country, and history. These included: a guided, walking tour of Lucerne, a boat tour of Lake Lucerne and hiking of Mount Rigi (see Figure 4), a day trip to Zürich to learn about the history of Switzerland's largest city (see Figure 5) and a day trip to Locarno to learn about the "Italian" influenced region.

Additionally, various activities focused on the educational aspect of the program centered on Swiss teaching and learning innovation. These activities aimed to allow interaction with organizations, institutions of higher education, and professionals who had innovative practices related to



**FIGURE 4.** The University of Tampa “Teaching and Learning Innovation in Switzerland” study abroad students and instructors at Mount Rigi.



**FIGURE 5.** Study abroad students listening to a tour guide share information about the city of Zurich.

teaching and learning in a range of educational settings. One of these activities was the visit to The Lucerne School of Art and Design, which is the oldest college of art and design in German-speaking Switzerland. During the visit, the group interacted with some of the research groups. Of particular interest was a meeting with the “visual narrative” research group. This research group explores narrative, staging, and interpretation in linear and non-linear media, investigates the use and reception of these media, and designs new communication strategies and formats in visual media.

Other activities included a visit to a Swiss public elementary school that uses tablets and laptops (a grant-sponsored program) as part of classroom instruction and to the Rudolf Steiner School Luzern where participants learned more about the integration of STEM (Science, Technology, Education, and Math) in the educational experiences of primary students. The visit to the Rudolf Steiner School Luzern also highlighted other topics such as “the importance of free play” and “arts in to make kids better thinkers.” Other educational activities include a visit to the FabLab Luzern Makerspace (see Figure 6 and 7), which is a public maker space, open to anyone who lives in Lucerne, Switzerland. Last, there was also a hands-on class with Professor Hanspeter Erni, from PH Luzern, titled “Introduction to Micro-Controllers,” in which participants in the study abroad program were paired with current graduate students at PH Luzern (who are in-service teachers) to learn about programming and coding LEGO robotics.

A breakdown of activities in a day-by-day format can be found in Figure 3. All of the cultural events, as well as the visit to the FabLab Luzern maker space, were organized by the study abroad service provider. All other educational activities were arranged and organized by Marisa (PH Luzern contact) and me (the coordinator of the program).

Overall, the educational activities allowed the learners to gain a sense of pioneering practices by Swiss teaching and learning professionals in different settings (see Figure 8). These experiences were unique in comparison to both the American methods in teaching and learning that the learners would usually be exposed to as well as the teaching and learning practices within our institution. Topics related to coding and LEGO robotics, maker spaces, the importance of art and design, and STEM education are areas that have not been fully integrated into the curriculum

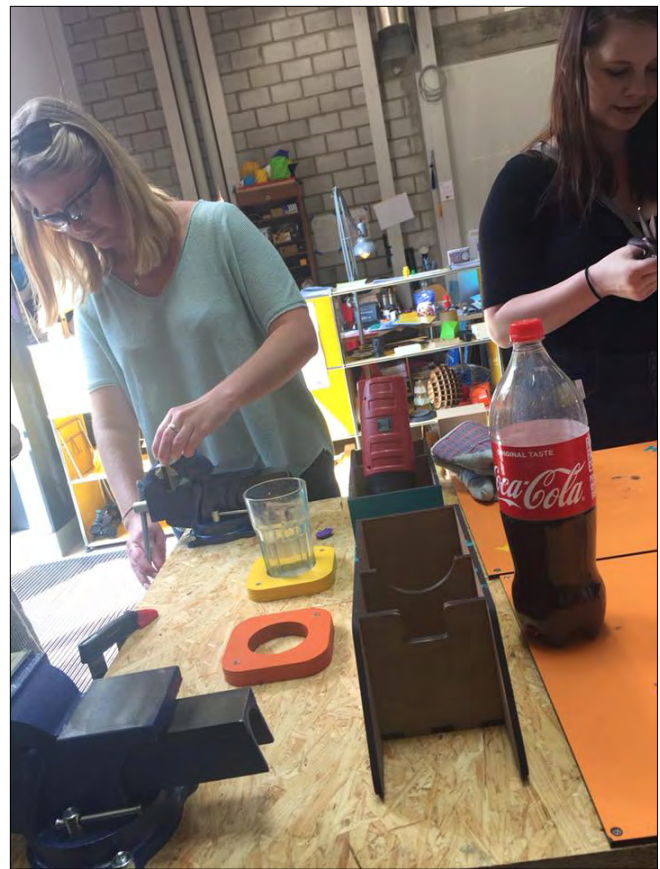
at our institution. This “Teaching and Learning Innovation in Switzerland” short-term study abroad program offered students a different perspective into their future teaching and learning experiences.

Although the intent of this paper is not to provide an evaluation of this short-term study abroad program but to share the design process, I do believe that sharing informal feedback from the students who participated in the program





**FIGURE 6.** Study abroad students at the FabLab Luzern makerspace, using a tool to melt a plastic bottle cap to make a shirt button.



**FIGURE 7.** A study abroad student at the FabLab Luzern makerspace, using a tool to flatten a plastic bottle cap to make it a shirt button.

can shed some light on their experience. Here are some quotes from participants of the program:

*“One of my favorite experiences in the program was visiting a university in Lucerne. In this school visit, we were able to sit in on two different classrooms in which we were able to see what they were learning, how they were learning, and we were able to interact with students in the university. These, and all other experiences in this program, provided me with a deeper cultural awareness of education systems in Europe and allowed me to reflect on educational practices that I had been a part of and learned about.”*

*“The semester after this program I entered my senior year completing my undergrad in elementary education. This program provided me with a different perspective on classrooms and educational systems of different countries. The program helped me to develop skills in my teaching practices that my peers had not been exposed to.”*



**FIGURE 8.** Study abroad students in a high school classroom, observing a presentation by students from the Kantonsschule Schüpfheim/Gymnasium Plus





**FIGURE 9.** Blog post by the study abroad student Marquis Holley about his journey while participating in the “Teaching and Learning Innovation in Switzerland” program: <https://utspartansabroad.wordpress.com>

*I learned different tricks and classroom practices that I took back home with me and developed as a result of participating in this program. I was able to apply the practices I had observed and sat in on during this program to my internship and classes in my final year of study.”*

*“I often reflect on the experiences we had during this program and observations I had made in different classrooms and schools, giving me a better perspective of working in my classroom and with my students. I feel that this program gave me a deeper cultural perspective that I continue to carry with me.”*

*“Along with traveling to various locations within Switzerland, including Zurich, Locarno, Luzern, Basel, and more, we were able to work with students from all grade levels and various ethnicities, Kindergarten through Higher Ed, which is rare, but so rich in terms of experiential learning purposes.”*

In addition to the informal comments, one of the students who participated in the study abroad program (Marquis Holley) shared his visual narratives, photos, and experiences while in Switzerland in a blog (see Figure 9): <https://utspartansabroad.wordpress.com>

On the last day of the study abroad program, Marquis wrote in his blog entry:

*“Today we traveled further out into the countryside of Switzerland to a rural area, where we stopped by an authentic cheese shop on the way to a vocational high school. Students attending the school specialize in various talents, including music, alpine skiing, languages, drama, and more, gave us a full display of their amazing, untapped potential. Our guide for the school teased on the train ride over that this area can be referred to as “The Wild Wild West of Switzerland.” Two students sang a subtle, yet mature vocal of Adele’s “To Make You Feel My Love.” Other students showed a video of their recent productions of “Westside Story” and “Hair.” We also went to a room that displayed some impressive art from students that attend the school. The faculty were extremely welcoming to us, and we even got to witness/listen to the cowbells as they were led up the hills into the mountainous terrain through the small town. After returning to Luzern, we as a group made our final rounds grabbing gifts/trinkets for family/friends*

back home, and later in the day, Dr. Romero-Hall, Professor Tankersley, Fred, and I went to meet with Dr. Monika Wyss at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. She gave an informative presentation on how to help faculty, staff, and students acquire the necessary skills for each group to be effective. It was a great parallel to Instructional Design and Technology, so it was a great reinforcer to our respective areas.”

## UNFORSEEN OBSTACLES AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

### Unforeseen Obstacles

- *Budget Revisions:* One of the main challenges that I faced in the design of the program was an agreement on the final budget and cost per student (including service provider fees, flight, food, insurance, and others). I initially worked on the budget form provided by my institution on my own, using the amounts provided by the service provider and estimating other expenses. This initial amount was then revised by the OIP and printed in the official flyer for the program. After advertising was sent to students, I received an email stating that the amount in the brochure was incorrect and that I needed to schedule a meeting with the OIP to re-calculate the amount. After the meeting, a new final cost (per student) was printed in the official flyer and sent to students. This issue confused the potential participants of the program.
- *Unexpected Circumstances Delayed Recruitment:* The study abroad fair that occurs typically in the first few weeks of the Fall semester was delayed almost a month due to a campus-wide closure during and after Hurricane Irma. Almost all recruitment efforts were hampered several weeks during this period. Then, immediately after Hurricane Irma, all faculty and students were primarily focused on resuming classes, catching up on class content, and trying our best to return to normalcy. It took some time to re-engage in recruitment efforts.
- *Communication with OIP:* After recruitment efforts resumed, my communication with the OIP was spotty. I was unsure whether the OIP had sent recruitment emails or if there were any inquiries made about the program directly to the OIP. There was a lack of communication that was unexpected and led to frustration. I took the initiative to check in with them regularly and request individual meetings with the study abroad counselors.
- *Change of CISabroad representative:* Two-months before departure, the CISabroad representative who I had worked with for almost six months, notified me via email that the program would be transferred to a different individual in the same organization. I was concerned that the new person would be unaware of program details or require additional information that was already discussed. Thankfully, the transition between the two CISabroad

representatives was very smooth and had minimal impact on the planning and organization of the program.

- *Meeting students before departure:* Scheduling meetings with students before departure was very challenging. Trying to organize the schedule of 9 individuals (including faculty members) to meet in person and discuss the program was nearly impossible. There were many conflicts with classes and other obligations. At first, I tried to organize a meeting during business hours, and we had minimal turnout. The second attend was labeled as “mandatory” and was scheduled in the evening. All the participants and faculty attended the meeting. It served to go over the rules of the program, create a Google Docs with additional information (questions & answers), schedule a specific meeting time and place the day of departure, and for the students to create their group text chat. In addition to the meeting schedule by the faculty, the students were required to attend an information session by the OIP (most students participated in the session).
- *Objectives of the Program:* As previously mentioned in the paper, as a designer one of the challenges was that my objectives were limited and influenced by the pre-selection of a specific country (Switzerland), the time frame of the program (May), and already knowing activities that I had been exposed to in this country in a prior visit. As designers, we are trained differently. We start with the learning objectives and then work on preparing our learning experience. Having to modify my practice as a designer was conflicting and challenging.

### Future Considerations

- *Plan for the unexpected:* I would not have been able to predict the issues with the budget and the final cost of the program (per participant) since this was the first time I was organizing a short-term study abroad program. Having a finalized and confirmed budget would have been a much better way to start communication with potential participants. Also, other unexpected situations can arise that change the preparation time. It is crucial for individuals designing this type of learning experience to consider in their design process and/or pre-departure implementation additional time for unexpected situations such as extra recruitment time, early reminders for deposits and final payment, and working with contacts/service provider to plan the activities.
- *Consider having individual and group meetings with students early on:* The initial plan was to have a group meeting with all the students shortly after full payment was submitted. This meeting would serve to explain the program details to the students and for the students to connect. Unfortunately, as mentioned before, schedules conflicted, and the initial group meeting was delayed. In hindsight, as part of the design and pre-departure implementations, I would have scheduled individual

meetings with each student at a convenient time to go over the program and get to know each student. I would have also incorporated in the design of the program, an initial group meeting with the student soon after the deposits were made since the deposit served to confirm a commitment to participate in the program.

- As I design another study abroad program in the future, an element that I plan to incorporate is an evaluation process before, during, and after the program. My institution does not require this evaluation process, but I believe it would give me as the coordinator of the program a better sense of whether the objectives set were met or not. As I review the learning objectives for the program now, I realized that perhaps these were complex for a 10-day short-term study abroad program, without a formal evaluation it is difficult to determine if all the objectives were met.

## CONCLUSION

This paper aims to divulge the process followed for the creation of the faculty-led short-term study abroad program titled "Teaching and Learning Innovation in Switzerland." The location of the 10-day study abroad program was Lucerne (Switzerland); however, as part of the cultural aspect of the program other cities in Switzerland and countries were also visited. Ideally, sharing this design process can aid the creation of future study abroad programs with similar themes to other destinations. The design of this specific study abroad program provides some insights into the logistical process that others can take to create experiences that provide a balance between cultural and intellectual goals.

Study abroad opportunities and programming focused on education-related topics can serve to engage students on critical reflection, assumptions and understanding about culture and diversity, and discussion on issues related to local/global dynamics in the teaching and learning process (Dunn et al., 2014). Overall, short-term study abroad might lead to higher-level cultural understandings and global perspectives of the participants (Gaia, 2015). The aim for educators that design and conduct these types of programs is to engage the student in international travel, effective programming, and experiences in unfamiliar environments, which combined can promote concrete transformative and experiential learning (Gaia, 2015; Strange & Gibson, 2017). Keeping this in mind, education leaders, administrators, and faculty should aim to consider study abroad experiences for the strategic development of programs and institutional goals.

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