

Type of Experience STUDY ABROAD

Systems Practicum: Client Projects Short-term Study Abroad (UVa in Argentina and UVa in Sweden)

Program Description

“Working with the clients provided the best opportunities to gain cross-cultural perspectives. Having studied abroad in a more traditional classroom was before, ... this style provided a lot more interaction with the local culture.”

“The course felt less like school work and more like I was actually doing a job and being valued for my output.”

The UVa in Argentina and UVa in Sweden programs engage teams of students in real-world, client-based projects. Almost no time is spent in a traditional classroom, as we typically meet with clients on the first full day in country. Projects culminate with briefings to the client, an executive summary-style report, and, in some cases, handing over or installing a software tool.

Projects in Argentina are broadly “international consulting” projects with wineries, including topics such as process improvement, information technology systems, new business development, and analytics. Projects in Sweden are “global sustainability consulting,” including topics such as urban planning and circular economy.

Both programs are open to all undergraduates and routinely are heavily oversubscribed, with over 300 students going on them over 10 years..

Program Highlights

- Real world client focus with high expectations of students making impact
- Intense mentoring by faculty team
- Not aiming to be a comparative program where students tour a bunch of companies or sites, but instead going for depth on one project in one place
- Works in culturally relevant industry (wineries in Argentina, sustainability in Sweden)
- Learn not only about global cultures, but also learn professionally-relevant skills

Tips for Replication

1. You need good partners in-country and those partners need not be universities
2. Focus learning on process (engaging clients and users to understand their problem, exploring solutions, iteratively converging on recommendations), not on specific technical skills
3. Expect to have to roll with it – you must be flexible when running program – students need to be prepared to be adaptable
4. Integrate opportunities for reflection; discussion has worked best for us

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Link to website:

<http://www.seas.virginia.edu/acad/programs/argentina>
(website for the Argentina program, which I started first)



Program Details

- Tenure of the program
 - UVa in Argentina: started January 2008, run 10x
 - UVa in Sweden, started May 2014, run 4x
- Participation rates (annual):
 - Argentina: 30/year (~70 applicants)
 - Sweden: 16/year (~30 applicants)
- Target population:
 - Open to all undergraduates
 - Argentina mainly commerce and systems engineering
 - Sweden mainly systems engineering and sustainability
- Duration of experience:
 - Argentina: 2 weeks
 - Sweden: 3 weeks
- Engineering related?
 - Yes, but more “interdisciplinary” than just “engineering”
- Course credit?
 - Yes (3000-level engineering or 4000-level commerce)
- Service component?
 - Argentina: no
 - Sweden: depends on project
- Reflection component?
 - Yes



**Hallmarks
Of
Success**

