

Global Working Group – CMP Summary from September 2015 retreat

Members present: Donna Lisker, Rebecca Hovey, Janie Vanpee, Cate Rowen, Kevin Rozario, Elliot Fratkin

Members of the Global Working Group of CMP reviewed 8 proposals. We found they naturally grouped themselves into three categories: foreign language study, partnerships and exchanges, and flexibility in study abroad. The following are summaries of our initial discussions:

Foreign Language Study: We reviewed proposal 103, which suggested creating the “Lexis” program, modeled on Praxis, in order to support summer study of foreign languages. Grants could be used either to start a new language or increase fluency in an existing one. We noted that wealthier students may self-fund such study already; the College has some summer study language grants but they are limited and typically only fund lesser-taught language study.

We agreed on the importance of foreign language study, and noted its implications for study abroad enrollment (Smith’s JYA programs require 2 years of foreign language, so students must either begin early or use summers to catch up). We need more information on demand and grant size in order to assess the practicality of this particular proposal.

Partnerships and Exchanges: Proposals 106, 109, 125, 166 and 171 all spoke to Smith’s various partnerships and exchange possibilities. They included proposals for a partnership on global health (106), international science exchange (109), a redesign of the American Studies diploma program (125), an exchange with Palestinian students (166), and long-term, comprehensive partnerships between Smith and one or more locations around the globe (171).

All these proposals speak to the belief that Smith’s partnerships and exchanges should be richer and deeper. In particular, they work against the notion (held by many students) that positions study abroad as educational tourism. The proposals seek to make the relationships developed abroad by Smith students and faculty reciprocal and meaningful on all sides. In other words, we don’t want our students swooping in, taking the best from another culture for a semester or a year, and then leaving without having made contributions to that community. We also want our exchanges to reflect our particular strengths, such as STEM education for women. The Coral Reef program in Belize is an oft-cited example of a productive and reciprocal partnership.

Just as we seek to be thoughtful about our students’ experiences abroad, these proposals also ask us to interrogate who we bring to Northampton in visiting student/scholar roles. Smith had put a moratorium on new student exchanges in recent years, since they can be difficult to staff and 1:1 exchange agreements are

often hard to fulfill. That moratorium was lifted for the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. The working group agreed that exchanges should be reconsidered, though the suggestion of Palestine would not necessarily rise to the top of that process. A group has already met a few times to discuss revisions to the American Studies diploma program. The proposals on global health, international science exchange, and long-term partnerships intrigued us, but would all require further information on scope and logistics.

Flexibility in Study Abroad: Proposals 175 and 198 argue for increased flexibility in study abroad programs, particularly for January term and summer study. Proposal 175 would redirect the funding for the Global Engagement Seminars to a faculty “FLEX” fund that would allow direct grants to faculty seeking to take students to international locations for shorter periods of time (such as J-term). Proposal 198 focuses specifically on J-term as an ideal time for faculty to take students abroad. Both proposals promote faculty-led travel with students to international locations in the context of credit-bearing courses.

Similar proposals emerged from the Global Working Groups that met during the 2014-15 school year. Though the market remains strong for students wishing to study abroad for a year or a semester, the Global Studies Center sees increasing interests among students and faculty in shorter-term experiences. Students in demanding majors (engineering, for example) may find it hard to take a semester away from Smith; other student groups (like varsity athletes or those in significant leadership posts) may also be reluctant to leave. Similarly, many faculty would like to have international experiences with students but cannot manage an entire semester or year away from home.

The Global Engagement seminars have been a worthy experiment, but they have proven very expensive for the number of students they serve. Setting up a GES is also very time and resource-intensive for faculty, the Lewis Center, and the Lazarus Center (who partners on Praxis grants). These proposals would ease the administrative burden and allow faculty to propose and leader shorter trips that would accommodate both faculty and student schedules. Both the Global Working Group from 2014-15 and the CMP group are enthusiastic about trying this model.