Education Abroad Outcomes Assessment Task Force
Final Report – December, 2010

"Certainly, travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that
goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living."
-Miriam Beard

Tim Garson, Provost of the University and Gowher Rizvi, Vice Provost for
International Programs appointed the Education Abroad Outcomes
Assessment Task Force (EAOATF) in 2009.

The purpose of the EAOATF: To develop tools to reveal whether (or not)
education abroad adds value to an undergraduate education

Task Force Membership
Reginald H. Garrett, Professor of Biology, Co-Chair
Marina Markot, Associate Director of Education Abroad Programs, Co-Chair
Marianne Baernholdt, School of Nursing
Dorothe Bach, Teaching Resource Center
Majida Bargach, Center for International Studies
Marva Barnett, Teaching Resource Center
Brad Brown, The McIntire School of Commerce
Angela Davis, the Office of Student Affairs
Dudley Doane, Director of the International Studies Office
Dana Elzey, School of Engineering and Applied Sciences
Joan Gore, School of Continuing Education and Professional Studies
Tom Guterbock, Dept. of Sociology and Director, Center for Survey Research
Janet Horne, Department of French
Lois Myers, Office of Institutional Assessment
Gowher Rizvi, Vice Provost for International Programs
Leonard Schoppa, Department of Politics
Bill Sherman, School of Architecture
Carol Anne Spreen, The Curry School of Education
Robert Swap, Department of Environmental Sciences
Adrienne Ward, Department for Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese
Eleanor Wilson, the Curry School of Education
Timothy Wojoski, International Studies Office, ex-officio

The EAOATF set out to identify those learning outcomes and corresponding
measures for education abroad that are applicable to the diverse education
abroad opportunities pursued by UVA students.
To this end, the EAOATF sought to identify appropriate methods and tools of
measurement that would provide data useful in assessing education abroad
learning outcomes.
As we undertook a comprehensive approach to defining and the assessing education abroad outcomes, we saw an opportunity for innovation and subsequent national distinction.

Task Force Working Strategy

The EAOATF members were asked to choose to work with one of three groups, and each group was assigned a specific task:

**Group 1.** Create a **quantitative assessment** tool, designed as a questionnaire to be administered to all study abroad students before and then again after their experience abroad. Lois Myers – Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies, Thomas Guterbock – Department of Sociology; Director, Center for Survey Research, and Marina Markot served as leaders of this group. Wendy Cohn, an Associate Professor in Public Health Sciences Administration and an expert in evaluation methods, was brought in as an advisor to Group 1.

Based on the Study Abroad “Statement of Purpose”, Group 1 identified five overarching Educational Outcomes representing four classes of outcome (Knowledge, Skill, Attitude, and Action):

1. Students apply their knowledge to create a global frame of reference in their response to situations and events. (Knowledge)
2. Students understand, respect, and appreciate cultural differences. (Attitude)
3. Students demonstrate understanding of themselves and their ability to cope and adapt. (Attitude)
4. Students apply their knowledge of intercultural communication to adapt to a different culture and to interact effectively with those from a different culture or cultural background. (Skill)
5. Students seek out opportunities for engagement. (Action)

Each of these Educational Outcomes has a sub-set of measurable learning outcomes. These learning outcomes are the subject of the quantitative assessment tool created by Group 1 (Appendix 1). This assessment tool was administered to all 2011 J-term study abroad participants. Results of this pilot study will (1) inform ongoing development of quantitative assessment tools, and (2) provide data to guide study abroad program improvement.

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Options considered:
1. Student essays. Strategy: Re-engineer the Personal Statement part of the Education Abroad application so that students address their personal goals, expectations, and aspirations in studying abroad. Upon their return, students will be given their Personal Statements and asked to write a second essay or that critically evaluates their expectations and whether they benefitted from the experience. Two essay questions were posed this Fall to all successful study abroad applicants:
   1. What do you hope to learn through this education abroad program that you could not learn at your home college or university? (250 words minimum/400 words maximum)
   2. In what ways will your education abroad experience differ from the experience of a tourist? (200 words minimum/300 words maximum)

Upon their return, they will be asked to write a second 500-word essay that assesses the expectations they had prior to embarking and reflects on how their experiences have influenced their cultural outlook. This follow-up essay will be posed as follows: Looking back at the essays you wrote when you applied to study abroad, please reflect— in light of your experiences abroad—on whether your expectations were appropriate, naïve, or misplaced. Drawing on your own experience, what attitudes would you encourage students to cultivate while experiencing a study abroad similar to your own?

Thus, a client base has been established for qualitative assessment and re-presentation of these questions to students returning from study abroad will provide raw material for a pre- and post-study abroad comparison and analysis of expectations and realities surrounding the study abroad experience.

2. A journal of the study abroad experience (Appendix 2). Keeping a journal is also recommended as a ‘Best Practice’ by Group 3. Journals or logs of personal experiences in a learning environment promote reflection and analysis by the student authors of such records. Encouraging or requiring students to keep logs of their academic work and daily encounters within an alien culture facilitates the capture of significant insights and provides the student with a tangible, searchable reference when reviewing the overall experience. Instructors and program directors will have access to these journals and thus the ability to assess directly, though qualitatively, the effects of the learning experience in both academic and cultural dimensions.
3. **Focus groups.** The purpose of such focus groups will be to reveal how students' cross-cultural perspectives have been influenced by their study abroad experience. The underlying assumption here is that study abroad has significant value and that the value is found in the cultural attitudes students acquire from their experiences. Sometime after their return, students will be asked to participate in focus groups that will engage in discussions of the expectations and realities of the study abroad experience. Study abroad professionals (faculty, staff) will guide and monitor the discussion, and record the salient observations. To initiate and focus the discussion, the following question might be posed: *Drawing on your own experience, what attitudes would you encourage students to cultivate while experiencing a study abroad similar to your own?*

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**Group 3.** Establish a set of criteria for **evaluation of education abroad programs.** These outcome criteria should be defined to assure that our education abroad programs achieve high standards of excellence.

1) Assessment of program goals
2) Outcome assessment of student participants
3) Assessment of directors and other faculty participants

Adrienne Ward and Dana Elzey were the leaders of this group.

Group 3 proposed a set of standards for (Appendix 3):

- the creation of new study abroad programs at UVa;
- the improvement of current programs;
- the potential evaluation of UVa study abroad programs.

It is generally recognized that the best study abroad education occurs when students are engaged in all of three program phases: pre-program, on-site, and post-program. Excellent programs not only integrate cultural and academic activity in each of these phases, but also encourage the most and deepest possible learning from the experience.

Programs must be differentiated by length and that not all of the ideas/best practices will be applicable to all programs. Program directors and faculty themselves will best know which practices are most appropriate, and "best."

Discipline-specific (academic) outcomes for overseas study should be identified. Where appropriate, these outcomes should be an integral part of every program's "mission statement."
To ensure the implementations of these standards of excellence for UVA study abroad programs, Group 3 recommends periodic review of the University’s study abroad programs on a regular cycle (3 or 5 years?). To oversee such review, Group 3 recommended the establishment of an Education Abroad Advisory Committee, constituted as a representative faculty body that would work in concert with the International Studies Office to review and evaluate all aspects of each study abroad program.

Action Items

With the aim of putting in place several mechanisms to assess the outcomes of education abroad, we implemented the following action items, as suggested by reports submitted by the three Groups.

1. Pilot trial of the survey instrument created by Group 1 with 2011 J-term students (Appendix 1).

2. Revision of the Study Abroad application essay, as recommended by Group 2. The International Studies Office began implementation of this revision in the Fall semester.

3. Implement the “best practices” recommendations proposed by Group 3 (Appendix 3). These standards of excellence are suitable for sharing with existing program directors and provide useful guidelines for prospective new programs. Distribution of these ‘best practices’ to program directors and the solicitation of feedback will serve as a pilot study of the efficacy of these suggestions.

4. Establish a faculty advisory group for program review, as suggested by Group 3.

Tasks Going Forward:

A. Critical evaluation of the assessment tools developed.
B. Analysis of the information captured by these tools
C. Implications for program design – Key elements of the study abroad experience, as identified by information obtained from assessment tools, will provide:
   1) the basis for a template for new education abroad program design.
   2) continuing evaluation of existing programs