By Charlotte West

Assessing Learning Outcomes for Education Abroad

MANY EDUCATION ABROAD ADVISERS have experienced a college junior just returned home from spending a semester abroad, rushing into the office, bubbling over with excitement about everything she learned about herself and her host country. However, while these individual stories of personal transformation are heart-warming, education abroad offices and institutions as a whole face a demand for aggregate data that demonstrates both program results and student growth. That's where the design and assessment of learning outcomes for education abroad comes in. Learning outcomes can cover a broad array of goals for student growth—intercultural competence, language proficiency, an awareness of global issues, among many others—and the challenge for education abroad offices is how to assess whether they are being achieved, and then effectively use the data collected.

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Defining Learning Outcomes for Effective Assessment

Effective design of learning outcomes leads to effective assessment of learning outcomes. Assessment experts argue that the first step is to spend time identifying what is important to the institution in question and then defining key terms in a way that is both clear and measurable. Only then can an institution select an appropriate assessment tool. "For example, developing intercultural competence is often a learning outcome in many education abroad programs. The problem is that this particular learning outcome is usually implicit and even where it is explicit, it is not defined in any operational way. Best practice, therefore, would require both the explicit recognition of the learning outcomes and defining it in a way that is measurable either qualitatively, quantitatively, or both," says Kris Hemming Lou, director of international education at Willamette University (WU).

Nick Gozik, director of the Office of International Programs at Boston College, concurs, adding that the desired learning outcomes should drive the selection of assessment tools, not the other way around. "It is critical to take time… and consider what you want students to get out of an abroad experience. Many (institutions) jump immediately into selecting an instrument, perhaps because colleagues at another institution are using it, without thinking about what they want to actually assess. Without knowing what you want to assess, you can spin your wheels and not attain data that are pertinent to your institutional context and needs," he says.

While identifying learning outcomes for education abroad, it is also important to seek input from the larger campus community. "One of the first things to do is to reach consensus—campuswide—on the purpose of education abroad and its role in the overall education of the student," Lou says.

At Willamette University, the education abroad office surveyed faculty on how they would rank a list of common education abroad learning outcomes, both in terms of individual departments' major requirements and with respect to the college's general education requirements. Following the survey, faculty forums were convened to discuss the results.

"The purpose of the forums was to refine our understanding of the survey data and brainstorm about what would need to be implemented and how," Lou says.

A related issue is making sure that learning outcomes for education abroad align with campuswide learning outcomes. At Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, the learning outcomes developed for education abroad actually informed the outcomes later identified for the entire campus. Elaine Meyer-Lee, director of the Center for Women's Intercultural Leadership at Saint Mary's, says that their process of developing learning outcomes for education abroad entailed three stages, first involving the identification of both general outcomes and then program-specific outcomes with a specific disciplinary component. Later on, when the institution as a whole

TOOLS
TO ASSESS EDUCATION ABROAD LEARNING OUTCOMES

There are a number of instruments available that can be used to assess various outcomes of academic experiences abroad. Following is a short list with a brief description of a few of the instruments one may wish to consider when planning to assess student learning outcomes.

Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI)

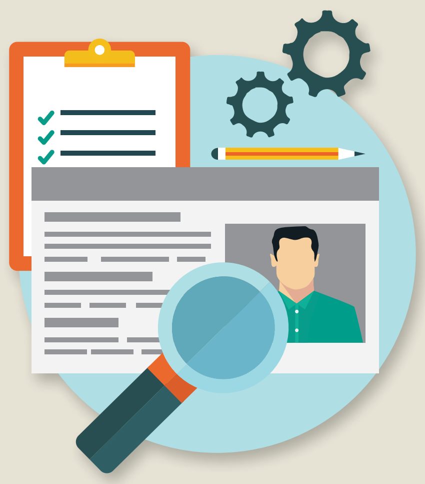
The BEVI allows for a wide range of reports and analyses on individuals, groups, and organizations. In an education abroad context, the BEVI "seeks to understand 'who the person is' prior to participating in a learning experience, 'how the person changes', as a result of the experience, and how these factors interact to produce a greater or lesser likelihood of learning and growth." More information is available at http://www.thebevi.com/benefits.php.

Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI)

The CCAI helps individuals identify their strengths and weaknesses in four areas (motional resilience, flexibility/openness, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy) that facilitate effective cross-cultural communication. Students heading abroad can assess their readiness for travel or study abroad with the CCAI. More information is available at http://ccaiassess.com/.

Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)

The IDI is a 50-item questionnaire used to assess intercultural competence. The IDI can also include up to six questions that can be customized and includes contexting questions that "allow respondents to describe their intercultural experiences in terms of (a) their cross-cultural goals, (b) the challenges that they face navigating cultural differences, (c) critical (intercultural) incidents that they face when they encounter cultural differences, and (d) the ways they navigate those cultural differences. More information is available at http://idiinventory.com/.



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Global Awareness Profile (GAPtest)

The GAPtest is a 126-question instrument designed to measure a student's global awareness "based on common knowledge in six geographic regions (Asia, Africa, North America, South America, the Middle East, and Europe) and six subject areas (environment, politics, geography, religion, socioeconomics, and culture), along with 18 questions about broad global issues." More information is available at https://globalawarenessprofile.wordpress.com/.

Global Competence Aptitude Assessment (GCAA)

The GCAA provides a comprehensive measure of global competence and readiness based on the Global Competence Model. The GCAA-Student is specifically designed for students in high school through graduate school and provides both pre- and post-testing. The GCAA-Student is helpful in measuring student readiness for the global workforce, assessing education abroad learning outcomes as well as validating internationalized or globalized curricula, among other applications. More information is available at http://www.globallycompetent.com/.

Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI)

The GPI provides evidence of global perspective of students at a variety of stages including pre- and post-education abroad experiences. The GPI seeks to measure "how students think, view themselves as people with cultural heritage, and relate to others from other cultures, backgrounds and values" on the cognitive dimension, the intrapersonal dimension, and the interpersonal dimension. More information is available at http://www.gpi.hs.iastate.edu/.

—David Comp, PhD, associate director of international programs at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business

adopted learning outcomes for general education, the study abroad office played a key role. "The education abroad outcomes informed the larger campuswide process. For example, we had to figure out how to achieve the same outcomes for the half of our student population that doesn't study abroad," Meyer-Lee says.

Michigan State University (MSU) took the opposite approach. After a committee of representatives from all colleges and key departments identified institutional learning outcomes, the campus internationalization committee asked faculty what those outcomes would look like from a global perspective, and these outcomes formed the basis

TOP 10 MYTHS

ABOUT ASSESSING EDUCATION ABROAD LEARNING OUTCOMES

MYTH #1: Pre/post surveys are sufficient for outcomes assessment.

Pre/post surveys can be part of the assessment efforts, but they provide an incomplete picture of student learning. Pre/post surveys, questionnaires, and inventories collect *indirect* evidence of student perceptions of their learning. It is also important to collect *direct* evidence of student learning *during* the learning experience (course or program). Using multiple direct and indirect measures provide a more complete picture of student learning.

MYTH #2: It's fine to collect the information and then figure out what to do with the results later.

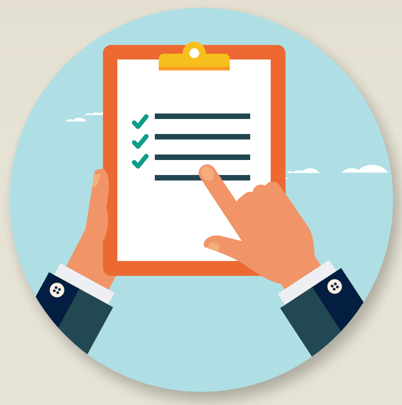
It's important to actually use the information collected; otherwise, it can be a waste of time and effort if the data are not used. It is especially important to use the collected information to provide feedback to students for their continued learning and development. An assessment plan ensures use of data.

MYTH #3: There's one best tool to assess outcomes in international education programs.

There is no one best assessment tool. The best tools and methods to use are the ones that most closely align with stated goals and learning objectives. Multiple tools and methods need to be used to provide a more complete picture of student learning.

MYTH #4: It's best to develop the program first and add the assessment in later.

It's best to "start with the end in mind" and develop a program with clearly stated goals and objectives. An assessment plan developed from the beginning can be very useful for program development, too.



MYTH #5: One person or office can do the assessment.

If possible, it's best to identify an assessment team (including students as the key stakeholders!) that can plan and implement assessment. Assessment can quickly become overwhelming for one person. Use the expertise around you, including faculty.

MYTH #6: International educators should agree on one standardized tool that everyone can use.

International education programs are not all identical. There are different missions, purposes, priorities, goals, objectives, needs, contexts, strengths, and so on. Assessment tools must align with goals and objectives for results to be valid. Given the many variances, no one tool will align with all the varied differences, learning objectives, and circumstances.

MYTH #7: The starting point is asking, "Which assessment tool should we use?"

The starting point is asking, "What are our goals and objectives?" What do we want our students to know and be able to do? What *evidence* is needed to show that the objectives have been achieved? *Clearly stated goals and objectives determine which assessment methods and tools to use.*

MYTH #8: The main reason to assess is for program improvement and/or advocacy.

The main reason to assess is to improve student learning—to provide feedback to students so they can continue their learning and development. Program improvement, advocacy, and other reasons become secondary. *Outcomes assessment is not the same as program evaluation.* These are two very different processes and too often, international educators conflate the two. Outcomes assessment is about documenting changes in student learning.

MYTH #9: Assessment is too expensive, takes too long, and is a waste of time.

With appropriate planning, assessment can be manageable, affordable (especially when adapting what's already being done instead of trying to do something "extra"), and efficient.

MYTH #10: Anyone can do assessment—no special training or background is needed.

Many incorrect notions are perpetuated about assessment (even presented at international education conferences and in publications), so it is important for those engaged in assessment to receive professional training and knowledge in the foundations of assessment. It's more than doing a pre/post measure.

Adapted with permission from Demystifying Outcomes Assessment for International Educators: A Practical Approach *(pages 111–112) by Darla K. Deardorff, EdD (Stylus, 2015).*

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for what the education abroad office uses for its programs.

According to Jim Lucas, assistant dean of global education and curriculum in the MSU Office of Undergraduate Education, education abroad offices have to balance their own learning outcomes with the reality of the institution to which they belong. "I'm not a fan of units making their own unique outcomes that are not related to the broader institution's vision. We've overcome this issue by aligning goals intentionally and allowing for multi-level assessment," he says.

Best Practices for Learning Outcomes Assessment

Lucas breaks down the assessment of learning outcomes of education abroad into three steps: (1) determining the role education abroad plays in the overall university learning outcomes effort and align the efforts as best as possible; (2) designing programs with assessment in mind; and (3) developing a culture in which assessment becomes a normal part of running a program.

At MSU, when departments are proposing new education abroad programs, the learning outcomes must be embedded in the program design. Furthermore, all education abroad proposals must be accompanied by an assessment plan.

"Proposals have to embrace both best practices for education abroad and show how the program aligns with the campus-wide learning outcomes," Lucas says.

Gozik agrees that assessment needs to become business as usual. "It can be easy to get caught in the act of developing an assessment plan and then spend little time implementing it. Some offices are forced to submit a plan for higher-level administrators or an accrediting board. Once they are done, the plan gathers dust, so to speak, on a shared drive, yet not much else happens," he explains.

To counter this, Gozik suggests setting up ongoing meetings for assessment, which can be facilitated by the creation of an assessment working group. "When team members are expected to provide updates on a regular basis, they are forced to demonstrate results," he says.

He also advises starting small. "Rather than attempting to assess all learning outcomes at once, it can be easier to focus on one or two for a given period of time, and then go back to the others," he says.

Gozik also suggests using resources that are already available on campus. "Finding an assessment specialist or a faculty or staff member who has expertise in developing certain types of instruments can be very beneficial. Engaging the expertise of others likewise aids in creating buy-in across the university," he says.

Lou adds that it also important to have a faculty member who can help sell the assessment tool to the rest of campus. "These initiatives need a champion, someone who is willing to take the lead and do the bulk of the work to move it along. Our university now has a learning assessment faculty committee too, so this work would be coordinated with that committee as well," he says.

Selecting the Right Tools to Assess Education Abroad Outcomes

Many campuses utilize multiple assessment tools that allow them to take a multimethod approach in order to capture both qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate different aspects of their education abroad programs. Examples of methods include pre- and post-program evaluations and student and faculty surveys.

Gozik says that it's important to capture both qualitative and quantitative data because they measure different things. "You need both qualitative and quantitative efforts. It is hard to understand concepts such as intercultural engagement with quantitative methods. These questions often have a social bias, so students know what we want to hear," he says.

He adds that students are normally poor self-raters: "As such, if we ask a student, 'do you think this program helped you with your critical thinking?' then we also ask 'if yes, give us a specific example of how this happened.' We also try to do critical incidents or case studies that allow students to write out their answers and look for changes pre/post."

There are many commercial assessment tools available—including the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), the Beliefs, Events, Values Inventory (BEVI), and the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI), to name a few—or institutions may elect to design their own.

"In selecting assessment tools, professionals can choose from both homegrown and for-purchase products. Both have their benefits. Instruments sold on a large scale, such as the IDI or GPI, have been regularly tested; it's also possible to compare results across institutions and over time, given that the data are being collected on a number of campuses," says Gozik.

"At the same time, there can be strong benefits to creating one's own instruments," he adds.

Gozik says that an example of an assessment tool that education abroad offices can easily develop themselves is a postprogram evaluation. "It is helpful to work with a survey expert or consult manuals on the subject, so as to construct questions that give the intended results," he says.

MSU, for example, is currently designing a new postprogram assessment tool that will have some boilerplate questions required of all education abroad programs, as well as some questions that specific colleges and faculty can add about their programs. According to Lucas, the survey can also be tailored to program specifics, such as programs that included a homestay. Similarly, questions that do not apply can also be omitted. A program that went to the United Kingdom, for example, would not ask students about foreign language proficiency.

Lucas says that the old way they did surveys was a one-size-fits-all approach. The new, modular survey design will allow each level of the university—institutional, college, department, and program—to collect the data that it feels that it needs. Faculty leading programs abroad can pull from question banks, and add their own.

Gozik advises keeping evaluations short so respondents will actually complete them and provide useful information: "It is important to go through each and every question and honestly determine whether and how the results will be used."

Lucas adds that although preprogram and postprogram evaluations are common ways to assess student learning, the method is also challenging. "We had a case where the essay answers on the pretest were longer and more rich than the post, which they did quickly just to finish it," he says. "If the students do not complete both the pre- and post-evaluation seriously, the data can be hard to interpret."

He suggests looking at samples of students' work to assess whether they are meeting the requisite learning outcomes.

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If an institution decides to use a commercial assessment tool, Meyer-Lee suggests trying out several of them on a small scale before making a major investment. "At Saint Mary's, we experimented with several tools before settling on one. We would take the assessments ourselves and discuss them from a perspective of what it's like for a student and even how useful it might be. When possible, I like it for assessment to be useful for students," Meyer-Lee says.

Using Assessment to Engage Students, Faculty, and Administration

Meyer-Lee says that giving students access to their assessment results can make the process more meaningful for them and encourage reflection on their own learning and development. "Asking students about their own efforts to engage while abroad helps them to get into a mode of reflecting on their learning, and not just the customer satisfaction mode that sometimes happens when filling out postevaluations, for example," she says.

At Saint Mary's, the development and assessment of learning outcomes actually helped strengthen their study abroad advising. "Articulating our learning outcomes was not only for assessment but also provided advising bonuses in terms of managing student expectations. They helped us find the right program for the student in question," Meyer-Lee says.

The data collected through assessment is also often used to refine study abroad programs. "We use the information to continually improve our programs. We make policy decisions and changes to the programs based on the data that we are getting back," Lucas says.

Gozik likewise stresses the importance of sharing assessment results with the wider campus community. "By distributing results, in a variety of ways, an office or institution can help to create a culture of assessment on campus. People filling out evaluations, for example, know that the results are actually being used for something, and they tend to be more inclined to respond and/or provide more complete responses," he says.

He also advises that education abroad offices consider the audience they are trying to reach. "Some groups will want more data and will be ready to digest longer reports. Others such as senior-level administrators will only want to see succinct summaries, which are easily and quickly digestible. Some will respond better to qualitative data, while others will focus on numbers. Knowing what will work best with certain groups allows for an office to more easily engage faculty, staff, and students in appropriate and effective ways," he says. **IE**

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