

Assessing student learning in education abroad programs: The professional school context

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WHAT STARTS HERE CHANGES THE WORLD
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Why work with a group of schools?

- Ensures that performance indicators apply to many institutions and programs
- Shares the costs of consultant (Alec Levenson, University of Southern California)
- Shares work load
- Clear objectives and central coordination have kept transaction and monitoring costs to a minimum
- But disagreement over the number of performance indicators and length of survey; some prefer “cafeteria” approach

Why the focus on study abroad?

- STSA programs growing rapidly
- Can build on work by FEA, ACE, FIPSE
- Stepping stone for developing tools for other experiential learning programs
- Narrow focus essential for generating a manageable set of indicators (we still had eleven)

Most of us still measure satisfaction

- 95% of institutions surveyed measure student satisfaction
- 40% measure gains in language proficiency
- Fewer than 1/3 assess academic achievement or personal development
- Fewer than 10% measure career-related outcomes
- 15% measure gains in intercultural proficiency

Source: IIE/NAFSA survey of study abroad programs (2000)

Our objectives

- Analytical rigor
- Realistic design: staff time, funding, student response rates
- Better programs
- Recognition of program value on our own campuses
- Disseminate best practices to non-Title VI institutions
- Satisfy new Title VI emphasis on evaluation

Generating the performance indicators

- Focus on measurable student learning outcomes tied directly to the Title VI legislation
- Review of similar projects undertaken by ACE (through FIPSE grant), third-party vendors (CIEE), professional associations (FEA) and other business schools.
- Literature review from international human resource management field, including consultations with Michigan faculty
- Working group participants and related stakeholders (including deans)
- Refinement and revision at September 2008 workshop, addition of creativity indicator in fall 2009

Performance indicators: Personal growth

- A. The student has experienced personal growth and development.
- B. The student has a greater tolerance for unfamiliar, confusing, or ambiguous situations.
- C. The student can demonstrate a commitment to continuous, life-long learning about international business, including language skills.

What's so "international" about A? B?

Performance indicators: Cultural competence

- D. The student can demonstrate behavioral and communications skills appropriate for the host country culture.
- E. The student has gained a critical, comparative view of his or her own culture.
- F. The student has adaptive skills that can be applied to multiple cultures.

Where is language proficiency? How can you gain cultural proficiency without language competence?

Performance indicators: Applications for business

- G. The student can analyze a business problem from multiple cultural perspectives.
- H. The student can demonstrate knowledge of the host country business environment.
- I. The student has chosen a job that is related to the study abroad experience through language, location, or content.
- J. The student has increased his/her social and professional network.

Can some indicators be integrated into academic assessment?

Our conclusions on methodologies

- Skepticism toward self-assessment, but we ended up using it extensively (with the help of a second consultant)
- Skepticism toward the e-portfolio model
- We liked assimilators for testing cross-cultural competence, but training and experience is needed to write them—and they work better for testing culture-specific competence
- Direct observation by a trained professional is ideal, but most of our programs don't even have on-site directors

Applying the methodologies

** Common survey
with pooled results*

A. Growth and development*	Scaled self-assessment, pre- and post-experience (SSA)
B. Tolerance for ambiguity*	SSA
C. Life-long learning commitment*	SSA
D. Cultural skills for host country	Cultural assimilators created and scored by bi-cultural teams
E. Comparative view of own culture*	SSA
F. Adaptive skills for multiple cultures*	SSA
G. Analyze from multiple perspectives	Graded assignments, cultural assimilator
H. Knowledge of host country	Graded assignments, cultural assimilator
I. Career choice	Longitudinal survey (+2 years)
J. Social and professional network*	SSA, Longitudinal survey
K. Enhanced creativity*	Standard creativity test

Survey design – sample questions

38. Please choose the response that best describes you right now (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree):

- “I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.”
- “I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.”
- “I change my non-verbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it.”

41. Below you will be given a category of objects. Please list as many members of that category as you can. You should focus on listing as many possible members of the given category as possible. The examples you generate can be commonplace or as out of the ordinary as you like.

Category: Modes of transportation (exclude conventional means: car, bus, bike, airplane, boat, train, taxi cab, subway)

Sample scenario for indicators D, G, H*

Morgan was excited about his new job in China. After studying the Chinese language for many years and working in the telecommunications industry in the US, he was assigned to run the wholly-owned subsidiary of an American conglomerate.

Working out of the Beijing office as General Manager, he had complete responsibility for the firm's human resource policies. He learned that his employees did not have any financial incentives in place to reward good performance. After a few months, he implemented a system of annual bonuses and salary raises that were based on annual performance reviews.

After one year, he concluded that the new policy was a failure. Some Chinese employees were working a little harder, but most of them were showing the same behaviors and attitudes as before. He had seen this policy work wonders in the US, and he was confused and frustrated by the Chinese reaction.

* Adapted from Wang (2000).
See also Brislin (1994, 1999).

Next steps

- Implementation at participating schools
- Schools beginning to specialize in indicators and methodologies (eg, Michigan and creativity)
- Include all types of experiential learning
- Longitudinal survey included in next Title VI cycle (2010-14)
- Design and produce outreach site
- Recruit additional participating schools