

Current Research in International Education: Study Abroad Outcomes

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KEY TEXTS, EMERGING OUTCOMES AND GAPS

input from a small, informal survey of 21 individuals engaged with study abroad outcomes research

Key Texts. 3 volumes stand out:

1. Bolen, Mell (Ed.) *Guide to Outcomes Assessment in Education Abroad*, Forum on Education Abroad
2. Deardorff, Darla (Ed.) 2009 *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, SAGE
3. Vande Berg, Michael (Ed.) 2004 Special Issue, *Frontiers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*

With two others receiving mention

- Lewin, Ross (Ed.) 2009 *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad*, AIEA
- Brewer, E. and Cunningham, K. *Integrating Study Abroad into the Curriculum: Theory and Practice Across the Disciplines*, Stylus

24 different articles, book chapters, and guides were also recommended, with articles published in *Frontiers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Education and Abroad* and the *Journal of Studies in International Education* most frequently cited

Trends in outcomes. Three themes dominate:

- Alignment of study abroad outcomes with home institution learning outcomes
- Closer connections with the curriculum and the work of the faculty
- Impacts on learning beyond intercultural development/outcomes identification

Concerns include:

- Reduction of assessment to Facebook “Liking”
- With increases in short-term study abroad, superficial outcomes
- Commodification of study abroad – focus on travel and enjoyment rather than deeper learning
- Study abroad professionals are ill-equipped to do assessment – yet institutions are neglecting it

Gaps in the research

- Assessment needs to move beyond intercultural skills to academic learning/skills development/global citizenship/behaviors – *at the same time more work is needed to understand development*
- The assessment of study abroad outcomes needs to be embedded within overall institutional mission/practice/assessment
- The assessment of study abroad outcomes needs to be driven by theory and undertaken with rigor
- Longitudinal impacts/Multi-Institution/Multi-Country Studies are needed
- With the research and discussion of study abroad outcomes assessment sporadic and fractured, review articles are needed.

Additional needs:

- Capacity building, that is, simple, practical approaches and training for education abroad staff to implement them
- A single instrument to be used across studies
- Larger studies involving a variety of government and private sector actors
- Move beyond numbers – “testing” and numbers do not produce meaningful assessment
- Align study abroad outcomes with core learning

- Rigorous assessment to demonstrate that study abroad is not the “magic bullet” that can kill “ethnocentrism and cross-cultural bias”

LESSONS FROM THE LITERATURE

Sample of 130 publications from 1990-2011, 104 journal articles, 24 books, 2 dissertations (see Forum on Education Abroad Resources for an annotated bibliography of the publications). Caveats: 1) the literature reviewed is a sampling, not comprehensive, and 2) were published predominantly in the U.S.

33	<i>Frontiers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad</i>
15	<i>Journal of Studies in International Education</i>
11	education/higher education journals
11	disciplinary journals (business, engineering, nursing, social work, etc)
9	foreign language
8	intercultural learning/development
6	student development/student affairs

While two journals dominate, the research is published in a wide variety of journals, making an overview difficult – but also indicating that research is being carried out by a variety of actors

Scope of research studies: 58% small, 28% large, 13% medium

What they look at: Language acquisition, (21), Learning outcomes (what are they?) (16), Intercultural learning/development (15), Student decision making (11), Global learning (8), Long-term impacts (7)

Implications of the studies: Implications for program design and outcomes research/research design predominate, but studies also look at curriculum design, advising, faculty development, student development, student decision-making, institutional policy, and risk, among others.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The literature does not necessarily reflect need. That is, individuals involved with study abroad outcomes assessment feel more should be done to align this work with larger educational aims and institutional mission and practice. However, this kind of work appears to be underrepresented in the literature.
2. There is tension between the desire for large-scale studies using instruments that can be used across studies vs. small-scale, localized studies.
3. As the assessment of study abroad outcomes frequently falls to study abroad offices, capacity building in these offices needs to be a priority.
4. However, setting outcomes and assessing them must move beyond the study abroad office and be aligned with institutional goals, practices, and expertise.
5. Study abroad outcomes assessment and related research are evolving; review articles could help make the research more comprehensible as well as drive new research and practice

ORGANIZATIONS beyond AIEA that may be helpful: The Forum on Education Abroad (*including its March 2012 Institute on Outcomes Assessment*), ACE American Council on Education, NAFSA, AAC&U Association of American Colleges and Universities, NILOA National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, Wabash College Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts, Teagle Foundation, Penn State Center for Language Acquisition Education and Research

EXAMPES OF DATA BASES: North Carolina State University: Internet Resources for Higher Education Outcomes Assessment <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/upa/assmt/resource.htm> , Center for Global Education (UCLA) <http://globaled.us/projects.asp>, Forum on Education Abroad bibliography of publications on outcomes assessment <http://www.forumea.org/research-outcomes-reviewsynopsis2011.cfm> , Australian Council for Educational Research IDP Database of Research on International Education <http://www.idp.com/idp-today/research-database.aspx> , Blogs and Twitter: see David Comp

