

University of Virginia

Education Abroad Learning Outcomes Assessment

Education Abroad Statement of Purpose:

University of Virginia views Education Abroad as an important educational endeavor, enriching both academically and personally, and crucial in preparing students for the realities of the global world. This unique learning experience combines intellectual pursuits with first hand exposure to different peoples and their cultural traditions. It provides the students with an opportunity to gain an international perspective on their chosen academic field or career path and to learn and practice important life skills - critical thinking, creativity, independence, flexibility, resilience, and the ability to interact and communicate across differences.

Education Abroad (Learning) Outcomes Assessment Task Force (EAOATF) – 2009-2010

In 2009-2010, the Vice Provost for International Programs at the request of the Provost and the Board of Visitors convened a pan-University Task Force with the goal to:

- A. Identify learning outcomes and corresponding measures for education abroad that are applicable to the diverse education abroad opportunities pursued by UVA students
- B. Develop tools for measuring the identified outcomes
- C. Develop a set of standards and best practices for education abroad program development, improvement, and evaluation.

A: Education Abroad Learning Outcomes

The Task Force identified **five over-arching 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.

Educational Outcome #1: Students apply their knowledge to create a global frame of reference in their response to situations and events. (Knowledge)	
Outcomes:	Measures:
Students demonstrate knowledge of interconnectedness/interdependence of political, environmental, social, and economic systems on a global scale and in a historical context	Direct Assessment: Reflective essays, journals Observations by faculty, host families Indirect Assessment: Re-entry Survey Focus groups Interviews
Students understand their own culture w/in global/comparative context	
Students apply culture-specific knowledge to think critically and comparatively about global issues	

Educational Outcome #2: Students understand, respect, and appreciate cultural differences. (Attitude)	
Outcomes:	Measures:
Students are able to observe while reserving judgment and to interpret unfamiliar cultural contexts	Direct Assessment: Reflective essays, journals Observations by faculty, host families Indirect Assessment: Re-entry Survey Focus groups Interviews
Students are aware of and sensitive to other cultures' norms and customs	
Students understand what is distinctive about their own culture in comparison with other cultures.	
Students understand and value differences between US culture and other cultures and traditions	
Students appreciate role of customs and tradition in determining acceptable behavior, attitudes, perceptions	

Educational Outcome #3: Students demonstrate understanding of themselves and their ability to cope and adapt. (Attitude)	
Outcomes:	Measures:
Students are open to discovery (Curiosity).	Direct Assessment: Reflective essays, journals Observations by faculty, host families Indirect Assessment: Re-entry Survey Focus groups Interviews
Students are able to adapt to changing circumstances (Flexibility)	
Students are able to retain composure and equanimity when they don't have information to cope with uncertainty (Tolerance for Ambiguity)	
Students are able to cope with frustration, adversity, or challenging circumstances (Resilience)	
Students are able to develop new strategies/styles for learning (Originality, Creativity)	
Students demonstrate self-confidence and decision-making capabilities (Independence)	
Students demonstrate understanding of themselves and their ability to cope and adapt. (Self-knowledge)	

Educational Outcome #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)	
Outcomes:	Measures:
Students demonstrate proficiency in host language sufficient to interact and engage with the host community.	Direct Assessment: Language proficiency tests Reflective essays Observations by faculty, host families
Students demonstrate appropriate use of non-verbal communication.	
Students demonstrate appropriate use of etiquette	

(greetings, thanking, gifting)	Indirect Assessment: Re-entry Survey Focus groups Interviews
Students are able to cope in situations and activities where English is not spoken.	
Students are able to match behavior/communication to cultural environment	
Students are able to interact effectively with people from another culture.	

Educational Outcome #5: Students seek out opportunities for engagement. (Action)	
Students seek out knowledge and different perspectives on global events and issues.	Direct Assessment: Reflective essays, journals Observations by faculty, host families Indirect Assessment: Re-entry Survey Focus groups Interviews
Students seek out and engage in diverse cultural situations.	
Students will continue to seek out opportunities for global engagement	For 4 th year or alumni surveys

B: Standards and Best Practices for Education Abroad Programs

Acknowledging that the best study abroad education occurs when students are engaged in all of three program phases: pre-program, on-site, and post-program, the Task Force developed guidelines designed to help programs to not only integrate cultural and academic activity in each of these phases, but also encourage the most and deepest possible learning from the experience.

The Task Force also recommended that discipline-specific (academic) outcomes for overseas study be identified. Where appropriate, these outcomes should be an integral part of every program’s “mission statement”.

Since programs differ by length and type, 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.”

PRE-PROGRAM BEST PRACTICES:

The period preceding an EA program sets the tone and outlines the learning goals for the program, thus laying the foundation for achieving many of the objectives of such programs. Generally, the pre-program phase or Orientation period can cover the following areas:

- **Introduction to Content and Context** – formal and informal – describes the program’s content in a broader academic and geographic context.
- **Awareness Building/Health and Safety** – stimulates awareness of potential health and safety issues, builds situational awareness, awareness of accepted social norms and the local/international legal framework pertaining to travelers and visitors.
- **Awareness Building/Cross-Cultural Interactions** – outlines cultural and intercultural notions, prepares the students for processing future intercultural encounters. Encourages cultural self-awareness, includes self-assessment.
- **Setting Goals and Expectations** – sets the program’s learning objectives; sets program expectations of students (including behavioral expectations) and takes into account students’ expectations for the experience. Emphasizes group dynamics and builds group cohesion; provides motivation for acquiring knowledge abroad.
- **Development of Learning Strategies** for maximizing learning abroad and its outcomes.
- **Assessment** – direct or indirect – 1) gauging the knowledge of world issues and current events in the host country, followed by reflection on the implications of knowledge gaps on the potential interactions with the locals; 2) gauging the cultural self-awareness and cross-cultural sensitivity.

Short-term programs, particularly J-term programs have limited Orientation time, whereas semester programs allow for more leisurely preparation phase. It is expected that the pre-departure orientations will be mandatory. Assessment opportunities should be woven into all aspects.

DURING-PROGRAM BEST PRACTICES:

The time on-site is obviously the heart of a program. Careful attention to the following components is critical to achieving many of the objectives of education abroad. Generally, the during-program phase can serve the following roles:

- **Engagement** – active vs passive involvement w/ host country can help avoid “colony” scenario; interactions w/ a variety of aspects of life in host country enriches overall experience; acquaintance or even better, friendship w/ locals, i. e., the formation of human relationships deepens the on-site experience and may extend it into the future.
- **Contribution** – efforts to give something of value to the host culture increases awareness of intercultural dependence and cooperation; demonstrates responsible global citizenship; fosters a sense of international understanding; and challenges students to learn more about the specific values of cultures different from their own.
- **Exchange** – processing experiences with others while on the program potentially affords a better overall learning scenario; may ease discomfort w/ foreign culture; sharing thoughts, feelings, observations, concerns, appreciations, etc., with a variety of interlocutors (incl fellow program participants, program instructors, residents of host culture) allows exposure to a greater number of perspectives.
- **Register-record** – taking time to make a record of one’s experiences while on-site yields fresher, more immediate data, in the moment and for future; increases consciousness of the experience and reinforces learning; records can be used in post-program activities, incl assessment of whether objectives were achieved; an archive of one’s abroad experience may also serve future academic and life endeavors.

POST-PROGRAM BEST PRACTICES

The period following conclusion of an EA program, or after the return of participants to the University, is critical to achieving many of the objectives of such programs. Generally, the post-program phase can serve the following roles:

- **Reflection** – formal and informal – strengthens/deepens learning through the development of connections between new and prior knowledge – improves retention
- **Sharing** – attitudes and perspectives gained abroad will benefit the University community if experiences, insights and learning are shared upon return – this is accomplished through formal and informal means via discussion, presentation, publication, etc.
- **Assessment** – self and program – assessment of learning and the extent to which stated objectives were achieved is a critical part of any academic program – assessment enables a strategy of continuous improvement at the program level, and guides further thinking and reflection at the individual level
- **Re-adjustment** – though typically less important for shorter programs, a return program can be very helpful in re-adjusting to the home environment following cultural immersion for several months to a year – the harmful effects of ‘reverse culture shock’

can be mitigated and, through a carefully designed and implemented return program, can even be channeled to support reflection and post-program learning.