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Forum on Education Abroad Session, 2010

Where Faculty Fit in Assessment

Literature Review

The accelerating trend toward sending greater numbers of U.S. students to study overseas (Open Doors, 2008) underscores the importance of faculty and administrators working cooperatively on developing the kinds of global engagements that the American public (NAFSA 2006) and the U.S. Government (Ailes and Russell, 2002; McPherson 2005) are calling for in the nation's higher education. Yet, faculty and administrators rarely work together on assessing study abroad outcomes, and the question of how faculty in the United States feel that study abroad should be assessed has not been given sufficient study.

To begin with, U.S. faculty perceptions of study abroad are not generally positive. According to the Carnegie Foundation, only 55% of faculty in the United States agree that connections with scholars in other countries are very important to their professional development, and only 45% agree (37% are neutral) that the curriculum at their institutions should have a more international focus (Altbach; Boyer; and Whitelaw 1994). More than a decade later, such sentiments still extrapolate to faculty views on study abroad (Stearns 2009), and perceptions remain among some faculty that study abroad amounts to a way, primarily for white females, to avoid more rigorous academic and professional development (Gore 2009).

Unlike the European Union, where international / inter-linguistic contacts are far more routine and where programs such as the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) and SOCRATES mandate internationalization of the higher education system (ec.europa.eu/education), faculty in the United States, bolstered by the status of English as the *lingua franca*, are far freer to take or leave international engagements. The divides in faculty support for study abroad, therefore, fall along peculiar lines: the technology and science fields, for example, are more cautious in supporting study abroad than are the humanities and social sciences (Stearns 2009), and faculty who think of themselves primarily as teachers show less support for internationalization than do faculty who think of themselves primarily as researchers (Forest 2002; Altbach 1996).

A review of the U.S. Fulbright Scholar Program bears out the subjective nature of U.S. faculty perceptions of study abroad: according to the Fulbright study, perhaps the most significant factor affecting U.S. faculty support for study abroad is, simply, their own relative lack of experience internationally. Faculty who return to the United States after participating in the Fulbright Scholar Program overseas consistently champion study abroad whereas prior to such experiences their support often trended neutral or negative. In a manner of speaking, the Fulbright Scholar Program provides faculty first-hand opportunities to assess the value of overseas experiences – their own in this case – and the results positively affect faculty support for study abroad (Ailes and Russell 2002).

So whether “it takes a curriculum” (Hovland; McTight; Skilton-Sylverster and Jamison 2009) or “an entire institution” (Brustein 2000), the central role of the faculty in developing their institutions is not in doubt (Auerbach, Bhandari and Gutierrez 2009; O’Hare 2009; Whalen 2009). Indeed, faculty are routinely considered on par with university presidents in sustaining internationalize efforts at their institutions (Heisel and Stableski 2009; Ray and Solem 2005; Sterns 2009). And faculty involvement or attitudes are included as key measures in most any published indicators of progress toward internationalization within higher education in the United States (Banta and Palomba 1999; Brandenburg and Gero 2007; Eugene 2008; Stearns 2009).

That said, faculty influence over the curriculum by itself does not guarantee faculty involvement in assessing study abroad outcomes. Consider, for example, that even as faculty determine which programs abroad earn credit toward graduation (decisions that would lend themselves logically to greater involvement in study abroad assessment), those decisions reveal the only statistically significant marker

of faculty involvement in integrating education abroad into the curriculum (Forum on Education Abroad 2005).

There is also no doubt as to the value of empirical research of study abroad outcomes (Deardorff 2009; Steinberg 2007; Streitwieser 2009). In response, groups such as NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the Forum on Education Abroad, and others have begun to develop committees and to publish handbooks devoted exclusively to assessing study abroad outcomes. However, administrators' focus on assessing study abroad outcomes has only gained such notable momentum in recent years, and one should not assume automatic faculty involvement in a process that has developed largely outside its control or established interests (Banta 1999).

Other factors affecting faculty involvement include how strongly faculty departments signal support for internationalization (Cassell; Lamy; Martin and Mason 2005; Ray and Solem 2005), and those signals are nascent, mixed, or missing entirely (Institute of International Education 2009). There are also few if any consistent opportunities for faculty to review the results of study abroad outcomes data, and even traditional faculty development programs have been underutilized as logical places to raise such important and complex matters (Bond 2009).

Of course, the logistical and financial challenges to fostering a culture of assessment are also very real (Bond 2009; Sterns 2009), and administrators bear large responsibility for first addressing those concerns. That said, the field has begun to make serious efforts at assessing the impacts that study abroad has on students, and the results seem positive across a range of categories such as improved in-class performance (Kuh 2007), better research abilities (Streitwieser 2009), greater appeal to employers (Rayman, Trooboff, and Vande Berg 2008), and numerous other benefits, including relatively novel findings such as increased creativity (Maddux and Galinsky 2009). Furthermore, study abroad's positive impacts on students hold true even for experiences as short as one month (Chieffo and Griffiths 2004), which is to say study abroad is not a zero-sum proposition forcing students to eschew the benefits of education at home for experiences overseas. Rather, experiences abroad routinely seem to enhance experiences back home.

And as the American Council on Education has definitively shown, the first steps toward bringing faculty and administrators in closer alignment regarding assessing study abroad outcomes might be easier than it appears: With financial support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the council's two-year project, titled "Where Faculty Live: Internationalizing the Disciplines (2004-2006)," yielded extraordinarily detailed faculty views on desired study abroad outcomes by simply asking for them from the Association of American Geographers (Ray and Solem 2005), the American Historical Association (Frankel; Gaines; Gillis; Kennedy; Manning; Michel; Reilly; and Stearns 2005), and the American Political Science Association (Cassell; Lamy; Martin; and Mason 2005).

As faculty in the United States still generally view study abroad and efforts to internationalize the curriculum with a notable degree of suspicion, administrators have cause to believe that involving faculty directly in assessing such efforts represents one of the more promising opportunities for positively impacting higher education in this country today. While there remain few examples of faculty engaging in assessing study abroad activity (Peterson 2008), and while this lack of participation contributes to the *status quo* in the United States (Forest 2002), such faculty disengagement need not be taken for granted. More work must be done, therefore, to study faculty perceptions of assessing study abroad outcomes.

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