Review of the Study Abroad Center at Iowa State University
Report of the External Review Team
Fall 2015

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Summary of Recommendations ............................................................... 2

II. Introduction and Charge .......................................................................... 4

III. Progress since 2006 external review.................................................... 5

IV. Recommendations
    A. Organizational Structure and Processes ........................................... 5
    B. Curriculum Integration and Program Development .................... 9
    C. Scholarships, Funding, and Underrepresentation .................... 12

V. Conclusion ............................................................................................ 14
I. Summary of Recommendations

1. Consider establishing a senior level administrative position such as an Associate Provost for International Programs, which would be dedicated solely to coordinating and further strengthening the university’s multi-faceted strategic internationalization efforts.

2. Further articulate the relationship between the SAC and smaller study abroad offices in terms of how they communicate and services offered, to ensure that both college needs and university strategic goals are being met.

3. Approve semester exchange partnerships on a university level.

4. In consultation with the Senior International Officer, identify a senior business office consultant to help further equip unit-level business offices with knowledge of advising financial practices.

5. Ensure that optimal student enrollment information is provided by the SAC to partner offices (e.g. student health, student affairs, as well as the colleges) to help them achieve their missions for student success and support.

6. In a collaborative effort between the EAC and SAC, let past practices inform the creation of a rubric for group program approval discernment; make the rubric available to the public in the spirit of transparency and reflecting best practices.

7. Seek input from EAC members in establishing criteria and making recommendations regarding new exchange partnerships.

8. Involve EAC members in expanded curriculum integration efforts.

9. Provide regular opportunities for EAC members to share feedback with multiple members of the SAC leadership.

10. Carry out strategic planning for all new program development of all program types, as a separate process from program approvals, in a collaborative effort between the
SAC and the constituent college and school study abroad offices, with strong academic/faculty input from the schools and colleges.

11. Make purposeful curricular integration efforts a major focus of the collaboration between the study abroad offices and academic units across campus.

12. Develop specific new programs with the intent to target underrepresented or new student audiences, or to support specific academic and international initiatives.

13. Provide a comprehensive website listing all known scholarships/grants for study abroad.

14. Find creative ways to encourage students to apply for underutilized scholarships.

15. Expand the use of strategically targeted scholarships from institutional funds.

16. Establish a shared campus development goal to increase both the number and size of scholarship awards. Funds housed in the SAC, in the colleges, or in other offices could all contribute toward the total, which would increase collaboration and minimize the sense of competition.

17. Engage other units on campus who work with underrepresented groups to build alliances and promote the value of study abroad.

18. Join the Diversity Abroad Network as an institutional member, to fully benefit from their materials and resources. Consider using the AID (Access, Inclusion, and Diversity) Roadmap self-assessment tool.

19. Create specialized communications to address undecided male students who may not yet be considering study abroad.

20. Ensure that the Office of Student Financial Aid has appropriate cost figures so that actual cost of attendance is being appropriately reflected in the needs analysis.
II. Introduction and Charge

The External Review Team benefited greatly from the SAC’s thorough self-study and other preparations for the three-day visit. The External Review Team Charge listed five key themes for consideration. These themes provided a very helpful guiding framework and they bear repeating in a paraphrased form for this document.

GROWTH: There is widespread agreement that study abroad needs to grow at Iowa State. How can the Study Abroad Center facilitate this growth, grow its own programs, and help the colleges do the same?

UNDER-REPRESENTATION: Our study abroad demographics are skewed and do not reflect our campus enrollment. While they are in line with the national figures, we want greater parity between these two populations. Specifically, we want to increase the percentage of males who study abroad and ensure that students of color, students with physical or learning disabilities, and students from lower socioeconomic groups are represented proportionate to their campus enrollment or better. How can we overcome some of the perceived and/or real obstacles?

VALUE and COST: Cost is often cited as a reason students do not enroll in study abroad. How can we reduce this burden to ensure students with significant financial need can afford our programs?

MAXIMIZING SEMESTER OPTIONS: While short-term faculty-led programs are the most popular study abroad format, we want to see more students enrolled in our semester and year-long options.

FRESHMEN: The annually administered CIRP survey indicates a significant number of freshmen (~60%) have an interest in study abroad; however, the percentage of students in the graduating class that has studied abroad falls well below that initial level of interest. The SAC has initiated and worked with colleges to develop a number of freshman programs (spring break and summer) and, while the numbers have grown, we would like more freshmen to take advantage of these opportunities.

During and after the visit, the External Review Team was presented with significant comparative data which further illustrated these points. The Team viewed each of the five above themes as vital hence they were touched on several times within the forthcoming sections of the document.
III. Progress since 2006 external review

The SAC and the university have clearly invested significant time and resources and have been highly successful in establishing foundational structures that facilitate student participation in study abroad, improve risk management and emergency response, and make processes more efficient.

With new partnerships and program types, participation rates have grown at rates significantly higher than university enrollment increases. Development and implementation of the ISUAbroad database and application system is a highly laudable accomplishment with many benefits. Training processes for faculty directing programs have been improved, structures for risk management and emergency response have been strengthened, and collaboration among units has increased.

This has all been accomplished in a period of greater personnel transition than historically has been the norm in the SAC, and the highly dedicated staff is therefore particularly to be commended. ISU is well positioned to build on these strengths and move to the next level of internationalization.

IV. Recommendations

Our recommendations can be organized into three key areas:

A. Organizational Structure and Processes
B. Curriculum Integration and Program Development
C. Scholarships, Funding, and Underrepresentation

A. Organizational Structure and Processes

The review team had the pleasure of meeting with a wide variety of constituents, and was struck by consistent and frequent comments regarding ISU’s decentralized campus culture. There was real and highly appropriate pride among many of the college-based faculty and administrators regarding their unit’s global accomplishments. A sense of ownership contributes to passion and commitment, and to success in developing learning opportunities that are relevant to particular disciplines.

Having noted the decentralization, however, the same faculty and administrators saw potential benefit in greater centralized support of their efforts, and greater collaboration
on key issues that impacted all units. Such enhancements could help the SAC address identified themes such as growth in study abroad participation and the perception of the value of study abroad in relation to cost.

The review team feels that increased coordination of additional facets of institutional internationalization, beyond study abroad, could also greatly strengthen ISU’s ability to serve not only internal but external stakeholders such as the state’s business and industry leaders, government officials, and general citizenry.

**Senior Leadership**

1. **Consider establishing a senior level administrative position such as an Associate Provost for International Programs, which would be dedicated solely to coordinating and further strengthening the university’s multi-faceted strategic internationalization efforts.**

**Responsibilities:** Strategic planning, fundraising, communication, support for university wide or multi-college initiatives, data collection and reporting, advocacy.

A dedicated senior level administrator would provide leadership in articulating global strategic goals which reflect the needs of all the university’s units, would contribute to university-wide fundraising initiatives, coordinate strong communication structures, collect data and report on the university’s progress toward internationalization goals, serve as a clearinghouse for information on funding and other international opportunities, and provide advocacy and support for the colleges and administrative units.

**Grants:** Senior level coordination would help position ISU to increase the number of major international research grants. Such grants typically require not only coordinated multi-disciplinary engagement, but also clear evidence of collaboration with the institution’s international office, oversight of relevant changes in the regulatory environment, and integration into the institution’s larger strategic goals.

**International reputation:** A dedicated senior level administrator could greatly strengthen ISU’s reputation as a world leader, further expanding research and study abroad opportunities, funding, and success in international student recruitment. Coordinating and documenting information about ISU’s international accomplishments would help the institution achieve wide recognition, through vehicles such as becoming a recipient of the highest honor in this field, the Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization.

**Scope:** By providing a combined presence and voice, such a position could help raise awareness and constituent support for the university’s global initiatives.
ISU would make this decision based on its unique needs and goals, but areas which could potentially report to this position either directly or more loosely include the SAC, the International Students and Scholars Office, International Admissions, the Intensive English and Orientation Program, the Council on International Programs, and liaisons in University Human Resources, the Office of the Vice President for Research, and University Extension and Outreach.

Collaborative Structures for Study Abroad
A number of collaborative structures already exist, but their potential has not been fully tapped. The review team met a large number of faculty and staff engaged in education abroad, and all were highly dedicated and knowledgeable. As is natural in any large institution, however, some units have a longer history of international engagement than others, and levels of funding, dedicated personnel, and opportunities to develop in-depth expertise vary among the colleges. The less active colleges in particular could benefit from the SAC’s targeted collaboration and support.

2. Further articulate the relationship between the SAC and smaller study abroad offices in terms of how they communicate and services offered, to ensure that both college needs and university strategic goals are being met.
The services the SAC offers to each of the smaller study abroad offices would not be identical, noting the variation in each of the offices’ capacity and capabilities, but clearer articulation of roles and responsibilities would be beneficial to communication and collaboration between the offices. Furthermore, this articulation would benefit long-term planning for staffing needs in the SAC and the smaller offices, and help reduce administrative redundancies and inefficiencies, which was noted as a university-wide goal by several persons the review team interviewed.

3. Approve semester exchange partnerships on a university level.
ISU could benefit from a model in which all exchange agreements are approved on a university level and are open to all relevant colleges, while maintaining priority status for the college that initiated the partnership, coordinates participation, and/or is most active in sending and receiving students. Institution-wide agreements would:
- contribute to comprehensive internationalization goals for the university
- minimize redundant or competing programs
- support curriculum integration
- ensure flexibility in maintaining student flow balances
- assist with risk management
- increase student participation across disciplines
4. In consultation with the Senior International Officer, identify a senior business office consultant to help further equip unit-level business offices with knowledge of advised financial practices.

5. Ensure that optimal student enrollment information is provided by the SAC to partner offices (e.g. student health, student affairs, as well as the colleges) to help them achieve their missions for student success and support.

Expansion of the EAC’s role: The Education Abroad Committee is highly effective in carrying out its clearly articulated role in reviewing, approving, and improving the quality of group study abroad program proposals. Expanding the role and activities of this committee would be beneficial to all stakeholders, and support the continued growth of study abroad.

6. In a collaborative effort between the EAC and SAC, let past practices inform the creation of a rubric for group program approval discernment; make the rubric available to the public in the spirit of transparency and reflecting best practices.

7. Seek input from EAC members in establishing criteria and making recommendations regarding new exchange partnerships.

8. Involve EAC members in expanded curriculum integration efforts.

In this process, the SAC partners with academic units to identify discipline-specific global competencies, highlights well-matched study abroad programs which help develop those competencies, identifies areas where additional programs might be need to be created, and develops discipline-specific advising materials that would benefit students, academic advisers in the colleges, and SAC staff. (see recommendation B on curriculum integration and program development)

9. Provide regular opportunities for EAC members to share feedback with multiple members of the SAC leadership.

Closer collaboration and more robust communication between the SAC and EAC would further reduce concerns over the fee structure by giving greater visibility to the benefits and services provided by the SAC, and helping to identify areas where additional support and advocacy are most needed by the colleges. The addition of a Program Coordinator position in the SAC focused on outreach to the colleges is a very good start in this process. Next steps could include regular, agenda-based meetings to:

• share ideas regarding new SAC programs before development or implementation has begun
• consult on proposed changes to the application process and software
• highlight areas where SAC advocacy on changes to university policies could benefit all units
• proactively share announcements such as upcoming deadlines, new programs, database functionality changes, scholarship winners, and campus visitors.

B. Curriculum Integration and New Program Development

Developing strategies in the areas outlined below should have a positive impact on the five key themes of interest identified in the charge. This includes growing study abroad numbers overall, in targeted student populations, and for longer programs, as well as reducing the perceived “expense” of study abroad.

Collaborative development for all program types

10. Carry out strategic planning for all new program development of all program types, as a separate process from program approvals, in a collaborative effort between the SAC and the college and school study abroad offices, with strong academic/faculty input from the schools and colleges.

Advantages: Though the External Review Team sees the benefit of new program development occurring both in the SAC and the school and college study abroad units, there is tremendous value in the coordination of these efforts through regular meetings among the constituent offices to discuss new program ideas and identify gaps in current offerings:
• get early faculty and advisor buy-in to new programs—particularly important to the SAC to prevent silo-ing, as they do not have their own constituent students
• increase cross-campus support for all program types, particularly important for exchanges which may have options for students of all schools and colleges
• work to develop an overall portfolio of programs that complement each other, instead of compete, to maximize student participation across campus, with an emphasis on both programs that target an individual major and those that don’t
• make advisors and faculty in each college more aware of additional SAC or other college-based programs that are well suited to their students.

Student choice: Through its various conversations, the review team observed that academic advisors and faculty were most knowledgeable and supportive of programs sponsored or housed in their own unit. While this is not surprising, it has a direct impact on the cross-campus messaging to students, and can limit program choice. Program type also appears to have a strong impact on program choice-- note the inverse
proportion between student participation and number of program offered per program type (Project Assist, SAC, and Affiliate).

Though some barriers to participation by program type are unavoidable due to system policies (graded credit v. transfer credit, tuition based v. fee based), it would be beneficial to overall participation to maintain, as much as possible, consistent policies and procedures (application process, billing, credit transfer/articulation, scholarship eligibility), advising strategies, and marketing/messaging plans for all programs regardless of administrative unit or program type. This would help reduce program type or administrative home being key factors in program choice, and shift more of the focus on program content as the key factor in students’ program selection, which would be in line with curricular integration efforts, outlined below.

Existing collaboration: The review team recognizes a number of collaborative structures already in place. The recently established ISUAbroad search engine, which includes all programs offered by the various offices, is a wonderful development to make it easier for students to learn about all of their options and to be able to choose the program that best works for them. The Education Abroad Committee, and its role in approving certain types of programs, is a positive structure that helps maintain program standards across campus. The next step would be for the SAC to build on this foundation.

Curriculum Integration

11. Make purposeful curricular integration (CI) efforts a major focus of the collaboration between the study abroad offices and academic units across campus.

Benefits: Overall, CI efforts are critical to:

• develop consistent messaging across campus about study abroad to students from faculty and staff
• increase academic unit “buy-in” to SAC efforts to increase study abroad participation
• increase the real and perceived relevance of study abroad to student academic and professional development, which in turn would have a positive impact on participation and the perception of value vs. cost
• encourage participation in longer study abroad experiences if they are shown not to delay graduation

Utilizing existing capacity: With an already high number of study abroad options available to ISU students, additional growth in study abroad participation could be achieved not only through strategic new program development, but by purposeful curricular integration efforts with the existing portfolio of programs.
The External Review Team was impressed by both the number of study abroad programs offered across campus as well as the variety of offerings, in terms of location, term, subject matter, and program type. However, the potentially overwhelming number of programs could also be a barrier. While continuing to recommend a combination of program types (both SAC and college-sponsored), consideration should be given to highlighting a reduced number of approved programs, to make the selection process more accessible for students and advisors. A reduced number of choices would also make the curriculum integration process more efficient, and ultimately lead to better utilization of program capacity.

**Career-related global competency:** Discipline-specific learning objectives, as they relate to academic progression and professional development, should be identified for each individual program, followed by mapping program options into academic progression for specific majors.

The review team would like to note that intercultural competence and personal growth should continue to be stressed as benefits of participation in all programs abroad, but discipline-specific academic and career goals should play a greater role in advising and marketing programs to students. This focus can be particularly effective with certain underrepresented groups.

**Setting strategic priorities:** The pilot CI project with Liberal Arts and Sciences was noted by the External Review Team as a helpful beginning. The expansion of program matching and course mapping university wide could be an overwhelmingly large project, and priorities would have to be established as to the order of engagement with departments and programs. CI with a STEM unit could potentially have a high impact on study abroad participation, because these curricula tend to be more highly structured and less flexible, and could benefit from well-articulated options.

**Targeted programs**

12. *Develop specific new programs with the intent to target underrepresented or new student audiences, or to support specific academic and international initiatives*

Along with cross-campus collaborative program development with a focus on specific learning objectives that integrate with on-campus academic progression, new program ideas to target specific populations should continue to be explored, including:

- pre-Freshman short-term programs (marketed to prospective students), as well as programs that target students at differing levels of academic and linguistic development
• creative ISU administered semester options (possibly faculty-led, multi-site with themes of global importance), with targeted scholarships, to increase semester participation
• multi-disciplinary short term programs, to increase the SAC program development role with the various schools on a multi-lateral basis
• additional experiential, research, or community-engagement oriented programs

C. Scholarships, Funding and Underrepresentation

With organizational and curricular matters in mind, a third facet the Team observed is the goal of access and sustainability of participation. A more intentional, targeted approach to scholarships and funding, with special attention to underrepresented groups, could help the SAC address the five key themes in the review team’s charge, and continue to build flourishing programs.

Scholarships

13. **Provide a comprehensive website listing all known scholarships/grants for study abroad.**

The centralized SAC office and website would be a logical way to communicate all known available Iowa State grants and scholarships, and external sources as well. Eligibility information and simple, concrete instructions on how to complete an application would be critical components of the site, available at all times and not just when a current application round is open. This comprehensive resource would serve all students, and secondarily provide a useful collaborative tool for all units.

14. **Find creative ways to encourage students to apply for underutilized scholarships.**

The External Review Team was struck by feedback that some scholarship funds are not fully utilized by students. Some felt that students didn’t view themselves as strong candidates for scholarships, despite the fact that 1 in 5 ISU students are Pell-eligible, and 50% receive some form of financial aid. Possible strategies to consider include:

• an enhanced centralized source of information (mentioned above)
• guaranteed scholarships for all participants on some highly-targeted strategic programs
• highlighting selection criteria other than high financial need or academic merit in some social media marketing, to capture students who may assess their own eligibility in those areas too narrowly
• a humorous contest in which students invent scholarship criteria that would make them uniquely eligible to be the only recipient; the follow up campaign could feature some of these winners and say “you could win a scholarship, even if you are not … [whatever they invented]"
15. **Expand the use of strategically targeted scholarships from institutional funds.** Targeted scholarships could be used to support either SAC or college-based strategic goals, identified in the collaborative program development and curriculum integration activities mentioned in previous sections. Possible audiences could include students on semester-long programs, Pell-eligible students, freshmen, students engaged in research, or students in particular academic disciplines.

16. **Establish a shared campus development goal to increase both the number and size of scholarship awards.** Funds housed in the SAC, in the colleges, or in other offices could all contribute toward the total, which would increase collaboration and minimize the sense of competition.

Campus buy-in will be essential to have a robust and fully utilized set of scholarship funds. A collaborative marketing scheme will undergird a successful scholarship program and potentially help Iowa State to be poised for other external opportunities and development.

**Underrepresented groups**

17. **Engage other units on campus who work with underrepresented groups to build alliances and promote the value of study abroad.**

A variety of units on campus have similar goals to increase participation among underrepresented students in various educational endeavors (e.g. opportunities for first generation students). Those units could not only provide valued input but also be a natural conduit of information sharing regarding study abroad opportunities.

18. **Join the Diversity Abroad Network as an institutional member, to fully benefit from their materials and resources. Consider using the AID (Access, Inclusion, and Diversity) Roadmap self-assessment tool.**

In addition to internal efforts, there are external networks that advocate for underrepresented groups in study abroad. A prominent organization is the Diversity Abroad Network. Iowa State may wish to consider this affiliation not only to benefit students but also to access the expertise of other professionals in the field.

19. **Create specialized communications to address undecided male students who may not yet be considering study abroad.**

The SAC can be lauded for its goal to increase the percentage of males studying abroad, and for creating a special “For Men” brochure. However, the current brochure is packed with details that would primarily be of interest to those already accepted to a program and engaged in pre-departure preparations. A brochure with targeted messaging including evidence of compelling career-related outcomes (such as quotes
from potential employers about the benefits of study abroad), could be more effective as a recruitment tool.

20. Ensure that the Office of Student Financial Aid has appropriate cost figures so that actual cost of attendance is being appropriately reflected in the needs analysis. Some conversations with the External Review Team suggested students may not be fully taking advantage of existing financial aid options. (Some mentioned students paying outright or “on their own.”) One interpretation is that the allowable gross cost of attendance in the study abroad educational endeavor is not always being reflected in the campus systems. In concert with advice of campus entities including the Office of Student Financial Aid, guidance about documenting official program costs could be provided by the SAC to ensure that students are fully benefiting from existing federal, state, and local resources.

V. Conclusion

The External Review Team gratefully appreciates the thorough exposure to study abroad administration we were granted through the review process. The in-depth access certainly leant itself to a better understanding of international education at Iowa State in order to make relevant recommendations that the Team hopes are consistent with institutional culture and conditions.

Looking back at the initial External Review Team Charge, there were five identified areas to consider: Growth; Underrepresentation; Value and cost; Maximizing semester options; Freshmen. These areas can broadly be divided into two areas:

- increasing participation in study abroad, both as a whole and also for specific targets (semester-long study abroad, freshman study abroad and to have study abroad demographics match campus demographics as a whole);
- breaking down real and perceived cost burdens of study abroad.

All of the recommendations are intended to assist with these two aspirations. The structural and organizational recommendations are intended to help increase study abroad participation by encouraging additional collaboration and communication in certain key administrative areas, while being consistent with ISU’s strong decentralized organization. Further work in new program development and curriculum integration would create a stronger connection for students between study abroad and their academic and professional development as ISU students, which would both increase participation and decrease perceptions of cost barriers by highlighting the value of study
abroad. Strategic planning in scholarships and diversity would both increase participation by targeted groups and decrease both real and perceived cost barriers.

Members of the Team were all greatly impressed with the high quality and level of development and professionalism of study abroad at ISU. Students, administrators, and faculty alike clearly value international experiences as important components of an ISU education. The strides the SAC has made in study abroad both before and since the last external review are indeed impressive: the review team hopes that these recommendations will help continue the strong tradition of education abroad that has been established at ISU.