Review of the Study Abroad Center at Iowa State University

Report of the External Review Team
April 2006

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The review team found significant enthusiasm and support for study abroad at ISU. The personal dedication and motivation of those involved was quite remarkable. Although there are many positive aspects to study abroad at ISU, the review team focused as charged on those functions, operating assumptions, and policies that could be improved to further enhance the university’s growing study abroad enterprise. Therefore, we present the following recommendations for possible improvement. Detail regarding each recommendation, including the rationale for making the recommendation, is found in the six sections immediately following this Executive Summary.

1. We recommend that the SAC be charged with creating a clear set of practical guidelines regarding study abroad operations that should be followed by all units operating study abroad. The guidelines would reflect current best practice on campus improved by attention to the national standards for operating study abroad articulated by such organizations as the Forum on Education Abroad.

2. We recommend that the SAC be delegated the responsibility and commensurate authority to develop, in conjunction with other operational units as appropriate, the necessary infrastructure to support the study abroad enterprise; specific immediate examples include the areas of purchasing and student record data discussed in Section III.

3. We recommend that the location of the SAC be advertised more prominently in the signage of the student union.

4. We recommend that the campus communication network be asked to publicize the relatively new structure of a Study Abroad Center separate from the International Student Office so that faculty, staff and students understand the resources available in these offices.

5. We recommend that the SAC examine and create a plan for site visits by staff who have responsibility for the programs; this may include SAC staff as well as staff in other units who are charged with making critical decisions about programs in their development and at times of crisis.

6. Faculty associated with study abroad deserve recognition for the work they perform associated with study abroad. We encourage ISU to explore, develop and communicate the ways in which faculty are acknowledged and rewarded for participation in study abroad.

7. We recommend that a set of standard operating procedures for the Risk Management Committee be developed, and that the Risk Management Committee be incorporated into a chain of command in which its recommendations can be vetted, and if approved, put into university policy. Give the Risk Management Committee authority to enforce such approved policies and procedures.

8. We recommend that the responsibilities of the SAEAC and the Risk Management Committee in terms of evaluating health and safety issues on study abroad be delineated.
9. We recommend the development of a comprehensive plan to provide all ISU study abroad participants with a mandatory health and evacuation policy. Enable the SAC to implement this policy, passing the associated fees on to the student participants.

10. We recommend that the Risk Management Committee be allowed to propose a mandatory training for all faculty leaders of study abroad program. Once approved as policy, empower the SAC to implement such a policy.

11. We recommend a substantial revision of the Program Directors’ Field Manual, and the creation of a separate document that is the university’s study abroad crisis management plan.

12. We recommend that the SAC operate on a different funding mechanism, to allow for needed financial support of the SAC, as well as future growth in study abroad. We outline two potential funding models:
   a. Make SAC into a self-supporting unit by allowing it to charge and retain comprehensive program fees that cover all direct onsite program expenses for SAC programs and an administrative or program fee to support SAC operations. These fees need not be based on ISU tuition, but rather reflect actual expenses incurred on behalf of study abroad at ISU.
   b. The SAC would continue to charge ISU tuition on its programs, but all tuition would be directed in large part to the SAC, to both operate programs and run SAC. In addition, SAC would charge program fees as appropriate and necessary to cover all expenses related to study abroad operations.

13. We recommend that the University seriously reconsider its traditional 90/10 program, which does not allow for adequate funding of study abroad services and is not an effective way to administer financial aid funds.

14. We recommend that operational standards regarding essential functions should be issued from the SAC either for schools and colleges to follow or to delegate to the SAC for which the SAC should be authorized to charge a reasonable fee (this relates particularly to core functions such as insurance, waiver forms, registration etc.)

15. We recommend that SAC support delivery of centralized study abroad ‘services’ by charging a comprehensive program fee to the colleges for each student enrolled in a college-based program, and to each student enrolled in a non-ISU program or experience.

16. We recommend a thorough analysis be conducted by SAEAC, with input from Risk Management, General Counsel, College Study Abroad offices, and Thielen Health Center to determine which functions and services should be centralized in SAC on behalf of all study abroad opportunities available to ISU students.

17. We recommend a process whereby faculty, academic advisers, and study abroad professionals work together, with strong support and encouragement from central administration and the colleges, to identify acceptable ways to integrate and articulate study abroad into the major and minor academic programs at ISU.
18. We recommend that SAC actively pursue membership and participation in additional 3rd party provider organizations (e.g., CIEE, IES, Butler IFSA, Arcadia CEA, Australearn, InterStudy, etc.) to provide access to additional and diverse study abroad opportunities.

19. We recommend that other options that can help expand ISU’s portfolio of available study abroad opportunities also be considered, such as pursuing additional relationships with institutions abroad that match ISU well, to include department and college based exchanges for faculty and students, and as well, additional institutional consortia or partnerships that allows ISU to share study abroad opportunities.
I. Introduction

The review team visited the Iowa State University (ISU) campus March 5-7, 2006. Prior to arrival on campus, review team members reviewed extensive background material provided by Trevor Nelson, Director of the Study Abroad Center (SAC). Materials reviewed in preparation for the campus visit include:

- 2006 Self-Study of the Study Abroad Center
- Study Abroad Program Director Handbook
- Study Abroad Program Director’s Field Manual
- Study Abroad Student Handbook

In addition to these written materials, the review team also gave close attention to the SAC’s web site, as well as the ISU general web site.

Once on campus, the review team had a very full schedule, which included meetings with:

- Provost and Associate Provost
- College Deans and Department Chairs
- Study Abroad program faculty leaders
- Representatives of college study abroad offices
- Study Abroad and Exchange Advisory Committee (SAEAC)
- Undergraduate assistants in the SAC and returned study abroad students
- Representatives of various support units on campus, including the Registrar’s Office, Financial Aid Office, Admissions, International Students and Scholars, Purchasing, Thielen Health Center Travel Clinic
- Risk Management Committee
- Staff of SAC

Trevor Nelson (Director of the SAC) had provided in the Self-Study a list of questions he would like answered by the Review Team, and the Review Team came to campus with a list of questions of its own.

II. Genuine Support for Study Abroad at ISU

At every session we attended, beginning with our entrance meeting with Provost Ben Allen and Associate Provost David Holger, and through our sessions on the second day with Campus Partners and Risk Management we found support and enthusiasm for study abroad as an important part of the undergraduate mission at ISU. We were duly impressed with the number of representatives from campus study abroad offices, leaders of study abroad programs, members of the SAEAC committee, and college deans that seemed to ‘get it’ with regard to the value of and need for quality study abroad experiences for their students. And without question, we found a dedicated and committed study abroad staff, from the college study abroad offices and advisers to the impressive staff of the SAC. ISU has the seeds necessary to grow and expand study
abroad and increase significantly the number of students enrolling in meaningful study abroad experiences.

III. Organizational Structure of Study Abroad at ISU

Faculty, staff and students with whom the committee met are committed to the campus vision of developing a global citizenry and recognize the role that study abroad should play in this development. In the course of the meetings with campus groups, the review committee heard many positive comments about the dedication of many individuals as well as individual units to the provision of quality study abroad experiences for ISU students. At the same time, in virtually every discussion during the course of this review, one or more faculty and/or staff stated that the further development of study abroad opportunities and participation would necessitate clarification of the organizational infrastructure underlying the study abroad enterprise.

As on many campuses nationwide, the development of study abroad opportunities at ISU has resulted from deliberate planning, individual faculty initiative, school and college priorities at given moments in time, and student demand. In our opinion, ISU has met a threshold where it is critical to identify the lines of authority for operating study abroad. Policies need to be developed and communicated, training around these policies needs to be made available and attended by those implementing programming.

At this time, the Study Abroad and Exchange Advisory Committee reviews program proposals and mentors (more and less informally) faculty who design programs. There is a Study Abroad Risk Management Committee that is empowered to cancel programs when study safety is threatened. The SAC provides advising and orientation for students and faculty leaders of programs, collects data about all students studying abroad, has the responsibility of dealing with emergencies (though not in all cases do they have the necessary information to deal with them), and is a resource for the school and college offices that operate programs. Virtually every school and college supports study abroad in some way, including professionally staffed offices, advisers with study abroad as part of their portfolio, faculty (some given reduced course loads and others assuming the role through sheer dedication without further benefit), or an assignment within the dean’s office. With scarce resources and multiple demands on all units and individuals, a careful review of any areas where there is needless duplication may benefit the various committees and offices.

Study abroad program options are made available to ISU students through the SAC which promotes its own programs as well as those run by other schools and colleges. The centralized information source along with advising and programming within the specific schools and colleges serves ISU students well and is consistent with the somewhat decentralized nature of the campus as a whole.

Since July 2005, the SAC has operated independent of the Office of International Students and Scholars and reports to the Associate Provost. This new structure is
consistent with the increasing demands for accountability by study abroad offices in today’s world, the expanding number of ISU students studying abroad, and the vision of even greater student participation rates.

Based on our meeting with the staff of the SAC, and comments made by others outside of SAC with whom we met, our observation is that the staff is committed, professional, and lean. The staff is well organized; all seem clear on their responsibilities and have made good use of student help to fulfill their mission. The staff is interested in and takes advantage of available professional development opportunities, including professional meetings and in some cases relevant university course work. As is true for most study abroad offices, the staff would welcome additional staff as their workload increases. As the responsibilities of the SAC as a central campus office is further clarified and assuming an adjustment is made in the funding structure (see section V of this report), the workloads of the existing staff deserve reconsideration. It would clearly be desirable to work out some arrangement to have the main reception desk staffed by professional staff on a full time basis.

The staff has made good use of the space and it appears welcoming and bright, remarkable given the lack of windows in any office. We noted that the location in the student union has much to recommend itself as a building in which there is a significant amount of student traffic though improved signage is desirable (the SAC’s name and location doesn’t appear on the union’s central signage).

As study abroad continues to grow at ISU, a need has arisen for clarification of the responsibility and authority for the infrastructure of the campus wide study abroad enterprise. This infrastructure includes mechanisms for quality assurance, the development of policy, communication of those policies, and mechanisms for follow-up/enforcement. The SAC is well positioned to assume this area of responsibility but would benefit from a clear campus mandate to do so. The SAC, with the clear authority to do so, could work with support services on campus whose responsibilities intersect with study abroad. Two areas which illustrate the potential are:

**Purchasing**

There seems to be considerable frustration among all concerned in the way in which regulations are made, communicated, and in turn carried out. Experience has shown many of us that expenses related to study abroad are best reviewed by a unit with intimate knowledge of programmatic particularities and knowledge of institutional guidelines. A centralized unit handling such matters, or at least with the authority to negotiate a process on behalf of the study abroad administrative units would ease tension and avoid unnecessary frustration on all sides.

**Student data**

While the student record system does recognize which students are abroad on ISU programs in any given term, the system does not have the capacity to identify which students are abroad and where at any given moment. In today’s world, this is essential information for good management of emergency situations.
We note that it is important for those involved in these decisions to have opportunities to familiarize themselves with the programs in operation. Site visits can be viewed as “frills” but experience has shown many of the most sophisticated study abroad operations nationally that even one site visit while a program is in operation can make staff better able to cope with the normal work as well as any crisis situations related to study abroad. It is not uncommon for a campus with a large study abroad footprint to facilitate occasional site visits by staff in associated units as well as study abroad staff to sites for this purpose. With the appropriate fee based structure in place, these necessary visits can be funded.

The faculty play a vital role in study abroad at ISU where the majority of students go abroad on faculty led seminars. We had the pleasure of meeting with several dedicated faculty leaders and also the deans who support such programming. As ISU further develops and likely diversifies models for study abroad programming to include more direct enrollment or the use of programs developed by 3rd party providers, the faculty will play an essential role in ensuring the quality of the programs in which the students participate through review of curriculum, site reviews, etc. It is essential that the role of faculty be recognized and that oversight of study abroad be integrated into their responsibilities.

Recommendations:

1. We recommend that the SAC be charged with creating a clear set of practical guidelines regarding study abroad operation that should be followed by all units operating study abroad. The guidelines would reflect current best practice on campus improved by attention to the national standards for operating study study abroad articulated by such organizations as the Forum on Education Abroad.

2. We recommend that the SAC be delegated the responsibility and commensurate authority to develop, in conjunction with other operational units as appropriate, the necessary infrastructure to support the study abroad enterprise; specific immediate examples include the areas of purchasing and student record data discussed above.

3. We recommend that the location of the SAC be advertised more prominently in the signage of the student union.

4. We recommend that the campus communication network be asked to publicize the relatively new structure of a Study Abroad Center separate from the International Student Office so that faculty, staff and students understand the resources available in these offices.

5. We recommend that the SAC examine and create a plan for site visits by staff who have responsibility for the programs; this may include SAC staff as well as staff in other units who are charged with making critical decisions about programs in their development and at times of crisis.

6. Faculty associated with study abroad deserve recognition for the work they perform associated with study abroad. We encourage ISU to explore, develop and
communicate the ways in which faculty are acknowledged and rewarded for participation in study abroad.

IV. Health and Safety Issues

To discuss issues related to health and safety in study abroad at ISU, the review team met with the Risk Management Committee and referenced the Study Abroad Program Directors’ Field Manual, the primary resource given to faculty to equip them for dealing with emergencies abroad.

In the meeting with the Risk Management Committee, several problem areas were identified. Foremost among the problems the review team noticed was a lack of real authority or clearly defined objective of the Risk Management Committee. For example, all members of the committee felt that there should be mandatory health and evacuation insurance for all study abroad students (a point with which the review team strongly agrees). The committee also unanimously agreed that some sort of faculty training should be required for all faculty leading study abroad programs. However, the committee felt they had no power or authority to mandate these recommendations. In fact, the decentralized nature of study abroad at ISU, with study abroad offices in many colleges and everyone developing their own set of standards, makes it near impossible for anyone to mandate any policy without explicit authorization to do so from higher up the administration. Given the possible consequences of poorly managed health and safety problems overseas, someone needs to have authority to address institution-wide concerns and potential liability risks. The Risk Management Committee seems a logical choice for exercising this authority.

The question of articulation between the Risk Management Committee and the SAEAC was also discussed. Trevor Nelson and the Senior Program Coordinator of the SAC, Christine Gemignani, are members of both committees. However, the roles and division of responsibilities between the SAEAC and the Risk Management Committee seem blurred. For example, the SAEAC, in reviewing program proposals, can deny approval to a program which it deems “unsafe” for study abroad. There is a need to delineate the responsibilities for evaluating program proposals, and evaluation for health and safety issues should reside in one place, with a clearly defined protocol for conducting such evaluations. The Risk Management Committee seems the logical place, with its membership drawn from critical university units such as General Counsel, Risk Management, Thielen Health Center and Student Affairs. This group of professionals is in a far better position to evaluate and address health and safety concerns than is a faculty committee.

In addition to the meeting with the Risk Management Committee, the review team closely examined the Study Abroad Program Directors’ Field Manual. The manual is a good resource for crisis management in study abroad, but it suffers from a lack of clarity as to the intended audience. Although the manual states it’s for faculty program directors, it actually contains information only relevant to the SAC staff (such as who answers what
type of calls at the front desk of the SAC) as well as contradictory information for the faculty themselves.

A complete discussion of the field directors’ manual and possibilities for improvement are outside the scope of this report. However, review team member Kathleen Fairfax would be happy to work with Christine Gemignani (the primary compiler of the manual) to discuss possible revisions. A visit by Christine to MSU might be beneficial as ISU works to improve its overall health and safety crisis management in study abroad.

Finally, several faculty and program leaders noted the desirability of separate orientations that addressed different types of programs. The issues likely to arise in a three week seminar certainly overlap with those of a semester program but the differing natures of the programs suggest a need for separate orientation programming and resource materials.

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop a set of standard operating procedures for the Risk Management Committee, and provide it with a line of command in which its recommendations can be vetted, and if approved, put into university policy. Give the Risk Management Committee authority to enforce such approved policies and procedures.
2. Delineate responsibilities of the SAEAC and the Risk Management Committee in terms of evaluating health and safety issues on study abroad.
3. Develop a comprehensive plan to provide all ISU study abroad participants with a mandatory health and evacuation policy. Enable the SAC to implement this policy, passing the associated fees on to the student participants. (Costs for such plans, tailored to study abroad, can be quite reasonable.)
4. Allow the Risk Management Committee to propose a mandatory training for all faculty leaders of study abroad program. Once approved as policy, allow the SAC to implement such a policy.
5. Revise the Program Directors’ Field Manual, and create a separate document that is the university’s study abroad crisis management plan.

**V. Budget Issues: The Need for a New Funding Model**

The committee is in agreement that the current funding for the SAC is at best, at a bare minimum required to accomplish its current mission. In addition, current funding and the current funding mechanism for study abroad at ISU is not conducive to growth. If the SAC is to grow in a manner that will adequately support an increase in the numbers of opportunities available and subsequently an increase in the numbers of ISU students going abroad, then either a significant increase in funding or a new funding mechanism that supports growth will be necessary. Since an increase in funding is subject to annual availability of funds and changing priorities, neither of which are conducive to a stable
environment or a mechanism for growth, we recommend that the SAC operate on an alternative funding model. Two primary options exist:

1. The SAC would be made a self-supporting unit, and allowed to charge and retain comprehensive program fees that cover all direct onsite program expenses for SAC programs and an administrative or program fee to support the Center. Such a comprehensive fee need not be based on ISU tuition, but rather reflect the actual expenses incurred on behalf of study abroad at ISU. In addition to supporting its annual budget, SAC should be allowed to retain program surpluses, earmarked for building reserve funds to support a development fund for new programs, an emergency reserve fund to support the office during off years and deal with emergency situations, and funds to support study abroad scholarships. The annual SAC budget should include expenses related to growth of operations and staffing, as well as maintenance of existing operations. At the same time, SAC should be held accountable for keeping program fees as affordable as possible, while meeting all expenses, and developing/maintaining necessary reserves.

2. The SAC would continue to charge ISU tuition on its programs, but that tuition money needs to be directed in large part to the SAC to both operate programs and run the SAC. In addition to tuition revenue, the SAC would charge program fees as appropriate. To accomplish this, or the model outlined above, the university would obviously have to end its “90/10” program in which 90% of tuition that study abroad students pay is returned to the students as a scholarship. Although a laudable intention, the 90/10 program has the effect of artificially depressing program fees so that all program costs are not covered, and of giving a large sum of money to students as additional financial aid, regardless of individual student’s financial need. One returned student with whom the review team met summed this issue of financial aid without regard to financial need perfectly when she said, “I got a great scholarship in the 90/10 program. But I would have paid twice what I paid for this program.” The intent is not to penalize needy students, but rather distinguish between needy and non-needy students. For the truly needy students, institutional aid, as well as more aggressive attempts to secure outside funding of study abroad scholarships, would help fill any gaps.

While we heartily support the interest and enthusiasm in study abroad that currently exists in the various colleges, ISU seems poised to benefit from a centralization of the operational standards regarding essential functions and it may be prudent to consider the actual centralization of some functions for all study abroad programs for which ISU is issuing credit. One possible model is to centralize certain functions in the SAC although this centralization would have to be coupled with the SAC charging a comprehensive program fee to the colleges for college based programs, and to each student enrolled in other ISU programs. Any fee would be determined by the range and depth of programs provided by the central office.

In order to determine which functions and services should be centralized in SAC, we recommend that a thorough analysis be completed by SAEAC, with input from Risk
Management, General Counsel, SAC, College Study Abroad offices, and Thielen Health Center. This analysis should focus not only on the most efficient manner to deliver study abroad services, but as well, (regardless of the study abroad program enrolled) the health/safety of all students and the risk/liability for ISU.

Recommendations:

1. We recommend that the SAC operate on a different funding mechanism, to allow for needed financial support of the SAC, as well as future growth in study abroad. We outline two potential funding models:
   a. Make SAC into a self-supporting unit by allowing it to charge and retain comprehensive program fees that cover all direct onsite program expenses for SAC programs and an administrative or program fee to support SAC operations. These fees need not be based on ISU tuition, but rather reflect actual expenses incurred on behalf of study abroad at ISU.
   b. The SAC would continue to charge ISU tuition on its programs, but all tuition would be directed in large part to the SAC, to both operate programs and run SAC. In addition, SAC would charge program fees as appropriate and necessary to cover all expenses related to study abroad operations.

2. We recommend that certain functions necessary for all study abroad opportunities be centralized in SAC, regardless of whether the opportunity is a college-based program, a SAC-based program, or a non-ISU program.

3. We recommend that SAC support delivery of centralized study abroad ‘services’ by charging a comprehensive program fee to the colleges for each student enrolled in a college-based program, and to each student enrolled in a non-ISU program or experience.

4. We recommend a thorough analysis be conducted by SAEAC, with input from Risk Management, General Counsel, College Study Abroad offices, and Thielen Health Center to determine which functions and services should be centralized in SAC on behalf of all study abroad opportunities available to ISU students.

VI. Increasing Participation: Curriculum Integration, Outsourcing to 3rd Party Providers

Curriculum integration of study abroad, or the integration and articulation of study abroad programming into major and minor degree programs, is a powerful way of strengthening the international dimensions of undergraduate education. We recommend a process whereby faculty, academic advisers, and study abroad professionals (both advisers and other study abroad staff) work together, with full public support and encouragement from central administration and the colleges, to identify acceptable ways to integrate and articulate study abroad into the major and minor academic programs at ISU. Such a collaborative process should result in an increased awareness by faculty and advisers of the importance of study abroad to their student’s degree programs, coursework, and careers, as well as practical knowledge of the types of programs available to their students.

One invaluable product of the process should be carefully selected lists of programs (and related advising materials) that faculty agree are acceptable towards major and minor degree requirements.
in their respective disciplines, majors, and minors. This should ensure students’ access to a variety of study abroad offerings that will count towards their degree requirements without the need to extend their time to graduation. Supportive central administrators and college deans, along with faculty and advisers who are better informed about why, when, and where their students should study abroad, should lead to increased enrollments in study abroad. The University of Minnesota has considerable experience in the area of curriculum integration of study abroad and is available to provide input and advice on how such an initiative at ISU might proceed.

One necessary requirement for a successful process of curriculum integration is a large and diverse set of available study abroad opportunities. Such a set of opportunities should include diversity in types of programs (theme; language, culture, and area studies; integrated study; internships, field study, and service learning; etc.), durations (short term, semester & academic year, etc.), and a healthy mix of faculty led and 3rd party provider programs. Without question, outsourcing of study abroad programming to reputable 3rd party providers is a very efficient way to add diversity and number to one’s set of program opportunities.

As best we can tell, ISU uses the International Student Exchange Program (ISEP) as its primary third party provider. And while ISEP does indeed provide entrée into many institutions abroad at a relative inexpensive fee for integrated study, their language requirements and heavy reliance on ‘second tier’ institutions limit access. We recommend that SAC actively pursue membership and participation in additional third party provider organizations (e.g., CIEE, IES, Butler IFSA, Arcadia CEA, Australearn, InterStudy, etc.) to provide access to additional and diverse study abroad opportunities.

In addition, other options that can help expand ISU’s portfolio of available study abroad opportunities is to develop deep relationships with institutions abroad that match well with ISU and it’s curricula, to include department and college based exchanges for faculty and students, and as well, additional institutional consortia or partnerships that allows ISU to share study abroad opportunities.

**Recommendations:**

1. We recommend a process whereby faculty, academic advisers, and study abroad professionals work together, with strong support and encouragement from central administration and the colleges, to identify acceptable ways to integrate and articulate study abroad into the major and minor academic programs at ISU.

2. We recommend that SAC actively pursue membership and participation in additional 3rd party provider organizations (e.g., CIEE, IES, Butler IFSA, Arcadia CEA, Australearn, InterStudy, etc.) to provide access to additional and diverse study abroad opportunities.

3. We recommend that other options that can help expand ISU’s portfolio of available study abroad opportunities also be considered, such as pursuing additional relationships with institutions abroad that match well with ISU and it’s curricula, to include department and college based exchanges for faculty and students, and as well, additional institutional consortia or partnerships that allows ISU to share study abroad opportunities.
VII. Conclusion

ISU has significant accomplishments in the area of study abroad. Participating students are well served on whole, faculty are engaged the oversight of the experience, and administrators dedicated to excellence. ISU is poised to grow its study abroad opportunities and student participation even further. We believe that a careful examination and redefinition of the funding structure for study abroad is a key to future growth.

We, the review team, are honored to have been asked to serve in this capacity. The three of us respectfully offer our observations in this report and hope that the SAC director will contact us if we can offer additional advice.