

our view

Standards

*second in a series;
generating thoughts and
discussion in the
study abroad community*

cīee

This is the second in a series of **“food for thought”** pieces from CIEE. The themes vary but all deal with **study abroad for U.S. undergraduates**. We present our ideas not as the only viable ones but rather **to stimulate discourse** in furtherance of the study abroad enterprise. We **welcome your comments** at any time to **editor@ciee.org**.

Recently there has been a good deal of discussion on standards for study abroad. The issue of standards is one we've addressed carefully at CIEE for many years as we've sought to build a comprehensive, sophisticated, and sensitive process for evaluating the overall quality of our Study Centers throughout the world. We don't expect that everyone will completely agree with our specific model, but we do believe that dialogue about standards and the elucidation of models like ours by various players in the study abroad enterprise is a useful exercise. It is not our goal to get to a one-size-fits-all approach to standards and evaluation, but rather to stimulate an ongoing discussion about approaches from which we can all benefit.

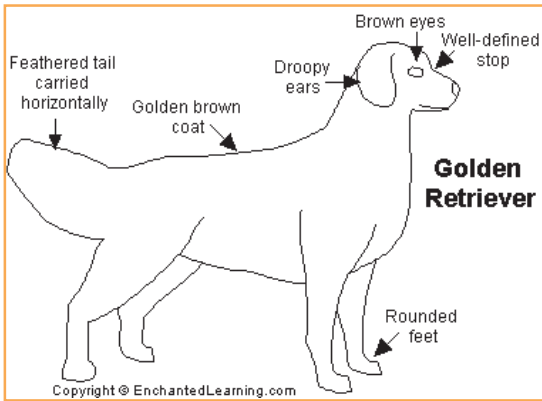
What Are Standards?

STANDARD: something established as a rule or basis of comparison in measuring or judging value, quality, etc.; a level or grade of excellence, attainment, etc., regarded as a goal or measure of adequacy; something used by general agreement to determine whether or not a thing is as it should be.

The theme of this year's World Standards Day (the 35th such celebration) was "Standards Connect the World." "Standards are a form of *exchange*," claimed the organizers of the day's activities, "and exchanges require connections and interfaces." "International Standards," they conclude, "are an essential foundation of global trading systems."

Standards in study abroad are also a form of trading system—the system by which U.S. colleges and universities select study abroad programs for their students and agree to recognize academic credit from those programs. But what are standards? And what kinds of standards will be most useful for our purposes? Sometimes it pays to look outside our field to understand best how to look inside.

The Golden Retriever:



Size, Proportion, Substance

Males 23-24 inches in height at withers; females 21^{1/2}-22^{1/2} inches. Dogs up to one inch above or below standard size should be proportionately penalized. Deviation in height of more than one inch from the standard shall disqualify. Length from breastbone to point of buttocks slightly greater than height at withers in ratio of 12:11. Weight for dogs 65-75 pounds; bitches 55-65 pounds.

European Union Wine Label Regulations:

The following must appear on a label or directly on the bottle in one field of vision:

The words – “TABLE WINE”

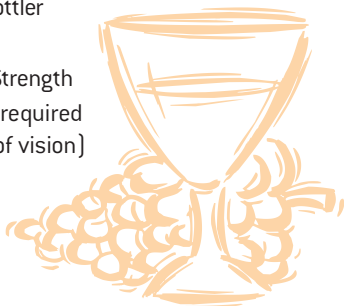
The Country of Origin

The Bottler Details - name, local administrative address & member state of the responsible bottler

Nominal Volume

Actual Alcoholic Strength

Lot Number (not required in same field of vision)



Geometry Standard for Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 2:



Analyze characteristics and properties of two- and three-dimensional geometric shapes and develop mathematical arguments about geometric relationships.

Recognize, name, build, draw, compare, and sort two- and three-dimensional shapes.

Pre-K – Identify, name, model, and draw two-dimensional geometric shapes (circle, square).

Kindergarten – Identify, model, and draw two-dimensional geometric shapes (circle, square, triangle, rectangle).

Grade 1 – Describe and draw two-dimensional geometric shapes and match plane figures to the appropriate name (circle, square, triangle, rectangle).

Grade 2 – Describe, model, and draw two-dimensional geometric shapes with up to eight sides.

These three examples illustrate three different approaches to standards. We would call these approaches the *inputs* model, the *natural characteristics* model, and the *outcomes* model. In the wine labeling standards, the focus is on inputs—what’s put on the label—a process well within the control of the provider. In the natural characteristics model, the golden retriever, the standard simply implies posting the empirical truth: height, weight, origin, and similar characteristics or requirements in order to be a golden. And in the outcomes model, best exemplified in this case by the geometry example, the focus is on what results from the effort, not how the outcome is achieved.

While golden retrievers, wine bottles, and pre/lower school geometry are certainly different from study abroad, let’s not throw out the puppy with the bath water. A study abroad program may not be like a golden retriever, but maybe it’s like a *dog* in the

best sense of that depiction. For a long time study abroad professionals have sought fundamental defining characteristics that should be possessed by all study abroad programs analogous to the zoological definition of the species *canis familiaris*.

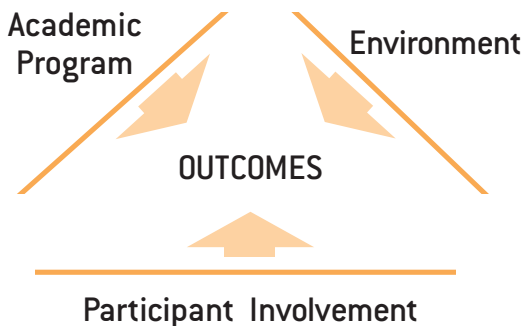
Labeling is also important in study abroad. While we won't get into "field of vision" issues as per the EU wine label rules, we do believe that promotional pieces on study abroad must provide certain kinds of information that prospective participants need in order to make good choices.

And outcomes are, of course, very relevant to study abroad standards. While study abroad specifications will be more general and more varied than those given for grade school geometry students, they should certainly encompass certain hopes and expectations concerning the outcomes of study abroad. We know that students who go abroad should bring home something of value that could not have been achieved without going. We also expect that at least part of the added value will be related to international awareness, perceptiveness, and the humility that often results from cross-cultural experience and learning.

What Kinds of Standards Does Study Abroad Need?

As noted on the World Standards Day website, standards can be of several types, requiring different processes for verification. **Performance standards** allow a product or program to be designed using a variety of techniques as long as the result meets certain established performance measures (outcomes), while **design standards** provide specifications that products must conform to (inputs or characteristics). Which are appropriate for our purposes? We think both.

Thus we need to define what we feel a student should get out of a study abroad program and we also need to offer guidelines for achieving those results. Our approach has been built upon a model of three important factors that contribute to successful outcomes:



In many program models, the curriculum (academic program) is seen as the core of the learning experience. We don't argue about the importance of having a solid, well thought out curriculum that is appropriate to the program's goals. But, in the special context of study abroad, we believe both the environment in which the learning takes place and the involvement of the individual student in the learning process have a significantly greater impact on the outcomes than while studying at home. And, more than anything else, we believe that study abroad is about outcomes, the cognitive and affective learning that results, not inputs per se.

In order to produce the outcomes we seek, we believe it is necessary to focus significant attention on strategies for influencing each of the critical factors that lead to outcomes, not just one or two. Well thought out standards should provide meaningful guidelines that will be useful both to program designers and to faculty/staff at colleges and universities that screen and select programs for their students.

What Program Design Standards are Appropriate?

Individuals and groups working in this area have proposed standards that are all over the map, ranging from themes like professional ethics to reciprocity; from cost to integration into the host society. While all these efforts are admirable, we would like to focus more narrowly on an approach to standards designed to ensure that the program outcomes

will be up to the expectations of students, parents, faculty, and college administrators. In this article, we speak out primarily on Input or Design Standards although we briefly mention Performance Outcomes as well. In our view, the outcome is determined by the input and therefore it's here that much of our attention should be focused.

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The Academic Program. Curriculum is at the heart of any study abroad experience. While we have stressed repeatedly that the total experience is what determines success or failure, if there is one element that is in the “we-must-get-this-right” category, it is the curriculum. This is clearly a first-among-equals matter. For many faculty at home, and for their administrative counterparts, the success of the curriculum will single-handedly determine program acceptability.

In writing standards for the academic program, we believe two concepts from other domains are helpful: the ancient Hippocratic Oath of medicine, and the notion of Value Added, a longstanding principle of economics embodied in the European equivalent of our sales tax but used in many other fields.

The Hippocratic Oath, we remember, enjoins its taker to “first do no harm.” In academic terms, this means that a study abroad program should be no worse than what a student could get at home. This does not mean that it should be *just like* what a student could get at home or even that it should be judged by the same standards. What it does mean is that the participants should derive a semester's worth of academic learning from a semester's participation.

What do we mean by “academic learning”? The exact definition varies somewhat depending on whom you ask but virtually everyone makes some sort of distinction between academic learning and simple knowledge acquisition (such as, for example, learning how the streets and avenues of New York are laid out, which blocks are long and which are short, what streets are one-way, and so forth).

In addition, we believe the plurality of today’s academics would agree that a credit-worthy form of learning differs from other forms of learning by being structured into coherent blocks of inter-related information and conceptual material. Thus, while a study abroad participant (or a tourist for that matter) wandering around the streets of Paris for an afternoon might learn a number of interesting facts (about language, history, sociology, popular culture, cheese, wine, bread, love, the Parisian economy, and more) each one of which might, under certain circumstances, appropriately be included in an academic course, the random and disconnected nature of what has been learned by our wanderer would, in the minds of most academics, disqualify the experience as a credit-bearing one. The key difference is in the purpose of the activity and the management of the outcome to achieve desired goals.

To nail this down in a standard is fairly straightforward: every academic program should have a statement of learning objectives against which both the success of the program overall and the success of individual participants can be measured. These should be specific and measurable. For example, in our view (a) below is unacceptable whereas (b) is an acceptable outline of objectives:

- (a) By the end of the program, students will have a better understanding of Transylvania.
- (b) By the end of the program, students will be able to:
 - Discuss critical periods of Transylvanian history
 - Identify major geographical regions of Transylvania

- Discuss major ethnic groups of Transylvania and their characteristics
- Discuss the significance of religions in Transylvanian history
- Reflect on the role of culture and tradition in ethnic identity
- Reflect on the value of multiethnic coexistence
- Consider the effects of policies concerning minorities

Value added in the study abroad context answers the question “Why go?” It’s not enough, in our view, for a semester abroad program to be equivalent to its counterpart at home. There should be some specific demonstrable benefits to the *abroad* dimension to justify the added expense and logistical inconveniences borne by both the individual and the institution. Just as *getting there* is no longer half the fun, *being there* is not a sufficient justification for going.

Value added in study abroad usually relates to either enhanced language acquisition, various forms of intellectual and personal development that can best be accomplished in a foreign setting, or both. Standards to ensure value added need to specify the specific values the program seeks to instill as well as to delineate the strategies that are most likely to succeed.

Let’s look at a specific example. If one of the important values of a given program is to enhance language learning, the pedagogy utilized in the program’s language classes becomes critical. There is no single best pedagogy that will fit all situations, but we can offer some observations on what the more specific linguistic goals of three hypothetical programs have to say about the best pedagogy for each.

Program A is for fairly advanced students and puts them in regular university classes in a foreign language after a one-month intensive language session.

Program B is for language majors at an intermediate level and seeks to develop fluency, accuracy, and

range, taking students from a high-intermediate ACTFL proficiency to an advanced proficiency.

Program C is a politics program taught in English in a country whose native language is seldom taught in the U.S. and it includes a survival-skills language course.

Now let's consider three hypothetical teachers. Teacher 1 is an everyday working grammarian who likes to stress accuracy and encourages the memorization of vocabulary. Teacher 2 has a more contemporary approach involving simulated lectures, conversations about literary themes, and written work—to paraphrase *My Fair Lady*, he doesn't care how good the student's grammar is, actually, as long as she can understand and make herself understood. Teacher 3 isn't really a language teacher at all, but rather a tour guide with good experience working with Americans and a flair for coming across as a warm and interesting individual. Which teacher should teach which course? You can match up the letters and the numbers to your own taste—the point is that no one pedagogical approach is best for all situations. The pedagogy in use for a language program should be based on the program's purposes, not just based on who happens to be available at that place, at the right price, or who is doled out by the host institution, if one exists, in a course for foreigners. Specific standards governing the language-learning aspects of programs need to address such issues.

Since this is so important, let's take another example focused on the international understanding aspect of value added. Again, consider two programs, one in Kazakhstan and the other in Australia. To keep it simple, let's make them identical in all other respects (we know this isn't practical but be a sport, play along). They are both area studies programs with fairly general content and neither has a significant language component. Here are two possible standards:

Standard (a): Program leadership must develop and implement specific strategies to assure that students

become aware of the subtler aspects of the differences between cultures and are able to relate these differences to their own lives, appreciating the differences between peoples who may appear quite similar.

Standard (b): Program leadership must develop and use strong support structures from cultural anthropology to guide the students in their understanding of the host culture in areas such as religion, politics, and history. Students should at each step of the program become increasingly aware, understanding, and tolerant of the great diversity that exists in human experience.

Standards to ensure value added need to specify the specific values the program seeks to instill as well as to delineate the strategies that are most likely to succeed.

Again, which standard goes with which program? In actual practice, a single more broadly-worded standard related to program leadership functions would probably capture these two ideas. However, to do this, one needs to move up the ladder of abstraction in a way that makes it increasingly difficult to measure performance. For standards related to onsite leadership to have any meaning, they must be prescriptive, and in our view that must be particularized to that program's goals. The more general the standard, the less useful in terms of truly measuring performance.

Environment. The environment within which a program operates includes both local elements and others that are added by the program operator. The former presumably are out of the control of the provider, yet it may be appropriate to include standards related to choice of country, city, and host institution. By adding these elements to program design,

the operator can have a significant impact on the overall experience of program participants.

For example, the types and quality of housing choices can have a tremendous influence on students' daily lives. An excellent housing placement can be the single most rewarding part of a study abroad experience. A troublesome one can be a significant drag on the participant outcomes. Housing comes in many varieties and no single choice is best and/or available for all locations.

Homestays are prized in much of the professional literature on study abroad. Yet, the truth is that dormitory and apartment living experiences often provide far more contact with host nationals than a room with a señora who is in it for the cash. Apartments with other Americans are usually relegated by study abroad professionals to the bottom of the preference heap. However, in some locations, this choice may be the most rational if least defensible one. Careful consideration of the pros and cons of all available options is required and it's important to avoid doctrinaire preconceptions. Clearly any standard related to housing will have to be very broadly drawn.

Many other aspects of the provider-controlled environment influence the success or failure of a program, from excursions to social events, from advising to computer access. The challenge is to write standards that clearly differentiate between programs that are making a full and complete effort to provide an excellent experience and those that are trying to get away with the minimum of services and costs.

Some study abroad operators make a deliberate decision *not* to mess with the local environment so that students will have as *real* a local experience as possible. The argument is that providing too many student services in an American style detracts from immersion in the local environment and inhibits cultural learning and effective program outcomes. Our experience suggests that both approaches are valid, provided that students sent to programs that

favor fidelity to the local environment over services must be chosen very carefully and given extensive preparation. Environmental standards must take into account these dimensions in order to determine true performance.

Participant Involvement. Although most operators accept responsibility for the academic program and many also hold themselves accountable for the environment or at least how the student interacts with that environment, all too often providers seem to take the position that what each participant brings to the table is his or her own responsibility. This aspect of the learning mix is often treated as a selection issue. In our view, this is very much a missed opportunity. Everything that happens to a program participant from freshman orientation, to the first session in a study abroad resource center can potentially influence the performance of that student on a program.

The initial attitude of faculty and staff when a student first expresses a desire to go abroad sets the tone. Approaches vary widely, from essentially negative and challenging responses that show little support for study abroad to the “everybody-is-welcome” and “no-idea-is-too-stupid” approach. Internationalization of campuses is about more than programming abroad; it’s about creating a context for that programming that is built in, not added on, to the core culture of an institution. Institutions that support study abroad in the context of meaningful individual goals and payoffs reap high rewards. Standards should address how this process takes place, and whether student screening and preparation deals with issues such as: “Why do you want to do this?”, “What are your goals and objectives?”, “What will you learn that you couldn’t learn here?” Schools that ask applicants to prepare careful study plans for every site they are considering set the right tone.

Pre-departure orientation varies widely from school to school. Well-planned, on-campus orientation can be the key to setting a student up for a productive,

serious experience abroad rather than a glorified vacation. The expectation process continues once the students arrive onsite. What local leadership says to students in the early days and what a Resident or Program Director gets the students to say to each other can contribute significantly to student attitudes and expectations. There are student development techniques in use on U.S. campuses that have excellent potential for influencing this all-important aspect of student involvement.

Writing standards in this area isn't easy. The problems of logistics and costs on U.S. campuses are very real and can often hamper international offices in their efforts to create and maintain the most effective pre-departure sessions. Nevertheless in our view, the field of study abroad would benefit enormously by promoting strategies that guide and enhance student expectations towards the most productive experience abroad, rather than allowing selection to be the key strategy for managing student involvement.

Outcome Standards

Most of our discussion of standards has been on design or input standards. The reason for this is that these are the matters we most control. Determining what we want for overall program outcomes is, in our view, the easy part. Getting there is far more difficult. Establishing standards that lead to desired outcomes, and that give us a means to measure the efficacy of our efforts is essential. In our case, outcomes must be consistent with our mission, "to help people gain understanding, acquire knowledge, and develop skills for living in a globally interdependent and culturally diverse world." For each Center and Program we've sought, with our partners and stakeholders, to develop Center-specific outcome goals. These in turn are translated into tactical plans for curriculum, enhancing the environment, and motivating participants. Each of these areas has its own set of standards and measurements. Implementing this with an ongoing

process will vary widely from institution to institution. Over the last decade, our experience is that the more we do, the more we know; and the more we experiment with various approaches, the more we understand the complexity of the task. Our standards and our evaluation system, therefore, are designed to be generally consistent across programs, but flexible and adaptive in meeting the individual needs of each one, and in incorporating new approaches over time.

As we suggested earlier, there are a number of possible approaches to standards. That said, we believe some notions of standards are very limited, and some approaches far less empirical and systematic than the task requires. Others are so complex that, as a practical matter, they are impossible to implement and administer. Striking a balance is critical.

Establishing standards that lead to desired outcomes, and that give us a means to measure the efficacy of our efforts is essential.

In *Alice in Wonderland*, there is a famous passage in which Alice seeks help in deciding which road to take. “Where do you want to go?” she’s asked. Unable to answer this question, Alice ends up being told in effect that when you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there. There is an implicit assumption in study abroad that we all know where we’re going—that we all agree on what good quality is, and that we all are seeking to do the best job possible in the context of shared assumptions. We’re not sure this is always the case. We believe that some added attention to the desired outcomes will be of great benefit to the task of crafting standards, and that standards tailored to specific program goals, is the right approach.

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