

Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad

© Elaine Meyer-Lee

The work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Volume 36, Issue 1, pp. I-V

DOI: 10.36366/frontiers.v36i1.1010

www.frontiersjournal.org



30 Years of Advancing the Field of Education Abroad: Reflections and New Directions for *Frontiers*

Elaine Meyer-Lee¹

Keywords

Authorial voice, editorial process, education abroad, higher education internationalization, new directions, quality standards, research rigor

Our Work and the Field

As we approach a year and a half of my editorship of our august journal and our 30th anniversary in 2024-2025, we write to share some reflections on our editorial process to date and a few new directions. We are excited about the consistent volume of submissions and the creativity and commitment to study abroad they show as we have navigated the period since the pandemic. The time now seems ripe for a bit of an analysis of where we have been as a journal and where we would like to see the field go.

Education abroad is still relatively new as a field. It indeed has been only since the eighties that we began to fully define ourselves as a profession and create a body of literature to inform our practice. In those early days, there was so little research that any actual data collected and analyzed on students studying abroad was helpful in creating some foundational findings. Many faculty members leading study abroad programs experimented with emerging measures of student intercultural learning (largely self-reported right

¹ GOUCHER COLLEGE, BALTIMORE, MD, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

afterwards) to assess the impact of their single programs. Similarly, early conceptual models were posited without necessarily helping to inform future scholarship.

Now as the field matures, it is time to coalesce more and tighten some of our definitions, while also expanding our horizons and connections. Since this journal is a key mouthpiece for the field, it has reached a turning point, looking to raise the bar in quality standards and approach, while encouraging new avenues of inquiry and methodological innovation. We stand ready to resource and help provide the vision for what literature is most relevant in advancing the field. As we prepare for our next thirty years, we want to shift some things to continue to open new terrains of data and thought. We are committed to cultivating the best evidence surrounding education abroad to inform both our effective practice of it and our advocacy for it.

We used several reflection processes to assess where we are currently as a field and journal and to chart our future directions. First, after a Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunity/Threats analysis, the Editorial Board divided itself into three working groups, one leading reflection on our mission and scope, another on our editorial board strengthening, and the third on our journal quality. Each of these working groups made recommendations and brought them back for discussion with the full Board. Also, we invited a group of Visiting Distinguished Editorial Fellows (Elizabeth Brewer, Jane Edwards, Susan Sutton, and Victor Savicki) to join us as action editors for a number of submissions whose review process had been complicated by the pandemic and editorial transition, and to come together for a reflective conversation on what they noticed and would like to see more of based on their long histories in the field. There were many parallel themes between this conversation and those of the Editorial Board working groups, which led us to plan several changes for our journal.

New Directions Forward

Our consensus is that moving forward, we would like to support more robust engagement with the existing literature, rigorous methodologies, critical interdisciplinary thought pieces, and clearly articulated relevance to practice.

We would certainly like to encourage engagement with the literature on student learning in education abroad but also on adjacent fields as appropriate, such as:

- Broader campus internationalization,
- Campus debates/protests of global issues,
- Climate change,
- Collaborative online international learning,
- Community-based learning and other high-impact practices,
- Decolonialization,
- Destination patterns,
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion,
- Host community perspectives and impact,
- Partnerships, in which education abroad is often embedded,
- Program variables; and
- Transnational education.

We believe it is critical to go beyond examining education abroad in a vacuum, to situate the complexity of it in the context of larger interconnected ecosystems and to investigate other fields from a student mobility lens.

In studies, we as a field need to be sure that we are utilizing rigorous research methodologies, whether quantitative or qualitative, which are carefully chosen and effectively used to address specific research questions. We want to encourage multi-method and longitudinal designs when possible. For quantitative research, we want to see larger datasets from multiple sources or meta-analyses of past studies. While case study is a legitimate qualitative method, the content analysis of this type of data must go far beyond offering quotes and a few observations. We must all remember, and uphold in our analytic and narrative practice, that correlation does not imply causation, and we must pay careful attention to not overreaching our data and to acknowledging the limitations of our methods, especially in the case of exploratory or preliminary research.

In addition to studies, we still welcome reflective, critical theorizing, and thought pieces, including those synthesizing multiple perspectives. Still, whether submissions are focused on these more conceptual essays or on research, we want to see the import for practice legibly articulated, i.e., the “so-what” question answered for our readers. A discussion of findings is not complete without pointing to some relevant transferable takeaways.

To support all aspiring authors in pursuing these directions for our field, we have made the following changes to the Journal:

- Discontinued book reviews.
- Updated our [mission statement](#) to focus squarely on research, scholarship, and critical reflection rather than models of practice alone, to define education abroad, and to explicitly include the whole world and relevant topics beyond student learning.
- Collaborated with the Forum on Education Abroad, our parent association, to begin referring submitted small-scale studies of one's own course to be published instead in their [Teaching and Learning Toolbox](#). The Forum also offers workshops to hone research skills.
- Created research-to-practice briefs as a category under which authors can make submissions to support evidence-based programming.
- Created new transparent peer-review rubrics for [manuscripts](#) and [essays](#) as a way to guide authors and provide clearer, more thorough, consistent, well-defined, and actionable feedback from first reviews as well as standardizing responses to reviews.
- Created a new [policy on voice](#) to support authors in writing in their choice of first-person or depersonalized voices as appropriate.

Now, we are also:

- Pruning and revitalizing our reviewer bank to ensure multiple perspectives in reviews (practitioners and scholars) with careful matching for the most useful feedback; and
- Restructuring our Editorial Board to improve efficiencies and time to decision. Members will now have three-year staggered terms which are renewable once, beside one historian named permanently. First-term Board Members will be considered Assistant Editors and review an increased number of submissions per year. We will soon put out a call for applications for these new positions. Those who are renewed for a second term may become Associate Editors, who are more focused on taking editorial action and contributing to the journal's strategy and leadership.

We look forward to future submissions from authors at all stages of their careers and are enthusiastic about the rich possibilities for our field in building solidly on past work and embracing the complexity of our current realities to support our next steps as educators. We expect the November issue to be a transitional one as previous submissions move through the process and the April one in 2025 to fully reflect the new changes.

Author Biography

Elaine Meyer-Lee is Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Goucher College. She previously served as an SIO for 18 years at other institutions and has been broadly active in the fields of international, intercultural, leadership, and diversity/inclusion higher education since earning her doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard in 1999. Her numerous fellowships and grants include a Fulbright, and she currently serves on the boards of ISEP and American Conference of Academic Deans, and on the Haverford College Corporation.