

Book Review

*NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for
Advisers and Administrators*

William Hoffa and John Pearson (Eds.)

1997. Second Edition.

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Educators. [492 pages]

R. Michael Paige and Barbara Kappler

University of Minnesota

Worldwide, education abroad is one of the cornerstones of international education on college and university campuses. From modest beginnings in the immediate post-World War II period, it has become a global phenomenon. Annually, well over one million of the world's students are studying in settings other than their countries of origin. Education abroad has become an industry.

The United States is a major participant in this enterprise. It receives almost 500,000 students per year and sends another 100,000 of its own overseas. Education abroad has become so popular and important that virtually every U.S. university has an office to manage study abroad advising and programming. In many respects, the field has become a profession with its own body of knowledge, professional standards and ethics, theoretical and conceptual orientations, desired student learning outcomes and institutional goals, and "best" practices. Consistent with education abroad's transition toward professional status has been the growth

of a “study abroad” literature. The volume being reviewed here is one of the centerpieces of that professional literature.

NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for Advisers and Administrators (second edition, 1997) is the latest in a series of NAFSA: Association of International Educators resource books on education abroad which date back to 1975. Written as an update of the first, 1993 edition, this volume is intended by the publisher, “to serve as the basic text in our vital and burgeoning field” and “as a key educational tool in NAFSA’s professional development program” (ix). In this review, we share our perspectives on how well, to what degree, and in what areas the volume succeeds in meeting these ambitious goals.

Method of Analysis

This is not a typical book review in several respects. First, two authors collaborated on the project, the rationale being that a volume of this magnitude and importance to the education abroad field would benefit from the perspectives that two reviewers, rather than one person alone, could bring to the task.

Second, prior to reviewing the book we identified a set of questions that would guide our analysis. Fundamentally, we felt that a volume published by the leading international education association in the U.S., and purporting to serve as the “basic text” and a “key educational tool,” should set a standard of excellence for the field. In reviewing this book, we sought to answer the following five questions:

- (1) *How well does the volume conceptualize the field?*
- (2) *How well does the volume balance theory and practice?*
- (3) *How well does the volume integrate the research literature?*
- (4) *How well does the volume set forth the “best practices” and standards of professional excellence in the various domains of education abroad?*
- (5) *How well does the volume meet the needs of different audiences: newcomers, mid-level professionals, and senior professionals?*

Third, we treated the process of analyzing the text as a research project, meaning we attempted to be very systematic in arriving at our conclusions. We started the process by reading the book independently, using these questions as our frames of reference. We then wrote up our own notes prior to any discussion with each other of our views. At the next stage, we held several meetings to discuss our findings. In the language of research, we were checking our inter-rater reliability, that is, the degree of consistency in our responses to these questions as well as in our overall viewpoints regarding the book. We soon learned that we had come to many of the same evaluations, answers, and conclusions. From that point, the completion of the review was a matter of refining those observations and writing the review.

Overview of the Volume

Overall, this is a work of considerable magnitude, an impressive 492-page text authored by 49 “contributors” and two editors, all professionals in the field. This team of editors and “contributors” has produced a comprehensive volume consisting of 19 chapters and two appendices.

The Guide is organized thematically into three parts. Part One, “Education Abroad and American Higher Education,” focuses on education abroad as a profession (chapter 1), and the campus context within which it is embedded (chapter 2). Four chapters then analyze the specifics of that context with discussions of faculty roles (chapter 3), academic credit (chapter 4), financial aid (chapter 5), and the office library and resources (chapter 6). The remaining two chapters discuss computerization (chapter 7) and promotion/publicity (chapter 8).

Part Two, “Advising,” shifts the focus to the goals, considerations, and issues facing education abroad advisers. Six chapters make up this part of the volume, beginning with two lead chapters on education abroad demographics (chapter 9) and advising principles and strategies (chapter 10). The next two chapters conceptualize two key issues in education abroad: student diversity (chapter 11) and “whole world study, i.e., non-traditional destinations (chapter 12). The last two chapters in this section discuss health and safety issues (chapter 13) and predeparture/reentry programming (chapter 14).

Part Three is entitled, “Program Development and Evaluation.”

Consisting of five chapters, it begins with a chapter on program planning, budgeting, and implementation (chapter 15). This is followed by presentations on program designs and strategies (chapter 16), work abroad/international careers (chapter 17), program evaluation (chapter 18), and legal issues (chapter 19). The volume concludes with two very useful and lengthy appendices, one being the *Report of the National Task Force on Undergraduate Education Abroad* (1990), and the other a very valuable education abroad resource bibliography.

Discussion

NAFSA's *Guide* represents one of the most ambitious undertakings in the education abroad literature today. In sheer scope, size, breadth of topics, and number of contributing authors, this volume is the most comprehensive text we know of in the field. As such, it clearly belongs on the education abroad professional's bookshelf. However, with respect to the five questions we posed, the *Guide* is not an unqualified success. While it has numerous strengths worthy of mention, it also has some serious shortcomings, in our opinion.

Part One: Education Abroad and American Higher Education

This section of the *Guide* sets the tone for the entire volume. First, it seems to us that these chapters were aimed principally at newcomers rather than mid-career or seasoned professionals. The chapters are replete with information that will be quite useful for newcomers, such as the identification of professional development opportunities (chapter 1) and things to consider in setting up a resource center/library (chapter 6). But the larger question about the reasons for having education abroad programs in the first place, addressed in terms of their unique contributions to student learning or the internationalization of higher education on campus, is not answered in much depth in this section. Instead, the chapters quickly move to an operational, "how to" level and tend to remain there.

Chapter 1 ("Being an Education Abroad Professional") exemplifies these tendencies. It starts off by defining professionalism and presenting the standards of professional practice adopted by SECUSSA in 1988, very

useful information for newcomers but old news to veterans. The remainder of this chapter talks about various professional development opportunities in the field, again information of greatest value to novices. The brief discussion (pages 6 and 7) of the five roles of study abroad professionals represents the type of conceptual analysis we were hoping to see more of in this volume. We think a number of topics would have been valuable for chapter 1, such as unethical and problematical practices in the field and the code of ethics.

Chapter 2 (“The Education Abroad Office in Its Campus Context”) was the place where we expected to find the answers to many of the most important “why” questions. The conceptual discussion on pages 22 and 23 touches on some significant issues (e.g., education abroad “represents a diversification of the undergraduate curriculum” and provides students with learning opportunities “impossible to achieve on the home campus”), but it does not explore them in much detail. Instead, the chapter turns away from theory and moves to the pragmatics of campus life. Again, we think the chapter succeeds in presenting useful information to newcomers, but as a centerpiece, frame-of-reference chapter for the entire volume, its falls short of our expectations.

Chapter 3 (“Faculty Roles”) is somewhat more successful in conceptualizing the topic. It includes an effective articulation of faculty roles, both on the home campus and abroad. There is a somewhat better mix of theory and practice here than we found in many of the other chapters in Part One.

Chapters 4 (“Academic Credit”), 5 (“Financial Aid”), and 6 (“The Office Library and Resources”) are much less conceptual and far more practical in nature than the preceding chapters. The information presented is very useful, particularly for those who are in the earlier developmental stages of setting up an education abroad program.

Chapters 7 (“Computerizing Education Abroad Operations”) and 8 (“Promotion and Publicity”) are the least satisfactory contributions to part one. We found both to be narrow in focus and unnecessarily detailed. Chapter 8 is too prescriptive about how to do promotion and publicity (see page 139 as a case in point). It micromanages the process without conceptualizing the different ways in which education abroad can be presented to different audiences.

Part Two: Advising

In many respects, this is the strongest section of the book. Succinctly entitled “Advising,” it encompasses much more than that. Chapters 9-14 in fact provide a stronger conceptualization of education abroad than either the Introduction or Part One. The authors are to be commended for the holistic description they provide regarding the nature of advising education abroad students. They discuss why their specific topic is relevant, describe strategies for carrying out professional work in this area, and include specific recommendations for including their topics in predeparture orientation sessions. It is appropriate that these chapters speak to the complexity of advising and leave the reader with a much better idea of the significant issues.

Chapter 9 (“The Current Demographics of Education Abroad”) not only provides data on those who are studying abroad, but also provides an interpretation of what these statistics suggest regarding those who are not. In addition, the chapter provides insights and raises critical questions about the barriers to study abroad, the predominance of “English language destinations” (even when English is not the native language of the majority at that destination), and the decrease in government funding.

The connections between theory and practice are strongest in Chapter 10 (“Advising Principles and Strategies”). The authors refer to important learning theories (Hunt 1979, Kolb 1984) and explain how these can be used in the advising process. They also present a number of human development theories (e.g., Perry 1970, Bennett 1986) as frames of reference for understanding the culture-learning potential of education abroad programs.

However, the chapter doesn’t articulate how we can best structure our work to assist the students in their cognitive, intercultural, and moral development. This critical issue of translating theory into practice, showing how education abroad can positively influence these important areas of human development, needs to be dealt with more completely in the next edition. If we cannot articulate this relationship, and then design programs accordingly, we will not be able to reach the desired outcome stated in the introduction of this volume, i.e., the development of individuals who possess “the ability to work with our fellow workers in culturally diverse environments.” The research literature can provide guid-

ance here and we suggest that key findings be incorporated into the text.

Chapter 11 (“Promoting Student Diversity”) discusses the very important issue of advising students in the U.S. of diverse backgrounds. The greatest attention is given to students of color (pp. 187-188) and students with disabilities (pp. 188-189), the latter being the better and more detailed analysis of the two. The discussion of practical strategies (pp. 190-200) is very useful.

Chapter 12 (“Advising for Whole World Study”), while emphasizing the practicalities of whole world study, presents a strong conceptual rationale for including non-traditional destinations in education abroad programs (pp. 201-204). For example, the authors make the valuable observation that “the United States needs a generation of citizens who have had first-hand experience of living in and learning about these tremendously important areas [Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East], with their myriad of cultures and explosive growth potential” (p. 204). The chapter also presents a very useful discussion of factors to consider when doing this kind of study abroad programming. One shortcoming was the inadequate attention given to the research literature; we think it could have been more effectively integrated into the text of this chapter to help make the case for non-traditional education abroad sites.

Chapter 13 (“Health and Safety Issues”) is more pragmatic, which is to be expected given the nature of the topic. The information is both necessary and valuable.

Chapter 14 (“Predeparture Orientation and Reentry Programming”) succinctly explains why predeparture and reentry are integral components of international education, with the observation that “time abroad must be embedded in an educational continuum” (p.233). This chapter implies that international educators have a responsibility to prepare learners for the upcoming study abroad experience, provide support to them in the field, and assist them in reintegrating into their home society as well as applying their newly acquired intercultural skills to their education and careers. This chapter presents strong educational reasons for predeparture and reentry programming. It also offers specific recommendations to guide the efforts of novice and experienced professionals alike in this area.

Our major criticism of this chapter is that it fails to set forth in unequivocal terms what we believe is the standard of excellence, or the

professional expectation in the field: every education abroad program should be implementing predeparture and reentry programs. Over a decade ago, LaBrack (1986) showed us the educational potential of integrating these programs into the “educational continuum,” a point reiterated by the authors of this chapter. In our view, there shouldn’t be uncertainty, hesitation, or equivocation on this point. The authors do not, however, make this case. They shift instead from the conceptual to the pragmatics of design and administration, information which we indeed found to be quite valuable though at times somewhat too detailed and prescriptive (e.g., the program design templates).

Part Three: Program Development and Evaluation

This concluding section of the book consists of five chapters, all of which provide a great deal of useful information for the reader. The first three deal with program development, design, and implementation issues. The authors of chapter 15 (“Program Planning, Budgeting, and Implementation”) pose the important questions that need to be asked when new education abroad programs are being considered (pp. 258-260). They then present three actual case studies (“success stories”) to illustrate the kind of program design, development, and implementation issues which can arise. The discussions give the reader useful insights into how these problems were resolved. Chapter 16 (“Program Designs and Strategies”) addresses similar issues but in a more conceptual manner. Here, the authors organize education abroad into five generic types of campus-sponsored programs and three co-sponsorship options. Then they discuss the characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages of each. Chapter 17 (“Work Abroad and International Careers”) rounds out the discussion of education abroad programs with a very detailed analysis of work abroad options and international career paths. The chapter concludes with useful checklists of things to consider before, during, and after the international experience. The resource directory in this chapter is excellent. These first three chapters complement each other nicely.

Chapter 18 (“Program Evaluation”) is less successful than the preceding chapters. In our view, it focuses too heavily on the process of evaluation, but does not give adequate attention to the content. There are solid if somewhat generic discussions about sources of data (e.g., students,

on-site staff), types of data (e.g., survey questionnaires), and problems in conducting evaluations (e.g., lack of time and resources). But the chapter does an inadequate job of discussing the types of questions that can be addressed, the reasons for posing them, the best times to ask them, and other matters related to the content of evaluation. Only 13 questions are posed (pp. 336-337), and they are presented in no particular conceptual order. The reader is then referred to the 89 questions in the volume *Study abroad programs: An evaluation guide* (1979), prepared by NAFSA and AACRAO. This would have been an excellent place to present an evaluation typology that refined the work of the earlier volume by showing different content areas at different levels of conceptual abstraction, ranging from the higher order student learning and institutional development outcomes to the more pragmatic cost and participation indicators, but the authors did not elect to do so.

Chapter 19 (Legal Issues) concludes this section and the book. It is a very readable discussion of how different aspects of the law impact education abroad programs. This chapter gives the reader valuable ideas about being proactive in program design and implementation so as to prevent legal problems from occurring later. Actually, this chapter better belongs in Part One of the book because it is about the context within which education abroad professionals operate.

Conclusions

Answers to the Organizing Questions: Our Summary Evaluation

(1) *How well does the volume conceptualize the field?* Overall, there is a general lack of theoretical and conceptual depth in this volume. Topics we felt deserved much more substantive discussion than they received include: the role of education abroad in the internationalization of higher education; education abroad and student learning outcomes (e.g., intercultural competence, global awareness), diversity in education abroad programs and participants. Part Two is the most effective section of the book, providing higher order conceptual frames of reference.

In the final analysis, we think NAFSA needs to take the high

ground on this matter; that is, provide a sophisticated conceptual, philosophical, and theoretical rationale for education abroad. This could help newcomers and experienced professionals alike in explaining the value and purposes of education abroad to their colleagues.

(2) *How well does the volume balance theory and practice?* The book is much more practical than it is conceptual, and not surprisingly, its strength resides in the vast amount of useful, well-organized information it provides the reader. The *Guide* raises issues critical to good day-to-day administration of education abroad programs and it gives professionals a clear sense of the breadth and complexity of the field. There is not much we would recommend changing on the practice side of the ledger, except for chapters 7 and 8. However, we feel that the conceptual side needs to be significantly strengthened.

(3) *How well does the volume integrate the research literature?* This is one of the weakest aspects of the book. There is almost complete disregard of 30 years of education abroad research. Few attempts were made anywhere in this volume to show how research findings might guide practitioners in program design, curriculum development, goal setting, and so on. This is in spite of the fairly major investment made in education abroad research during the past decade.

(4) *How well does the volume set forth the “best practices” and standards of professional excellence in the various domains of education abroad?* The authors systematically avoid articulating “best practices,” standards of professional excellence, or benchmarks for performance in the education abroad field. We were particularly disconcerted with the somewhat indifferent, almost *laissez-faire* tone of the volume. In our view, there really shouldn't be any debate, for example, about the importance of predeparture orientation or reentry programs. The standard of professional excellence is not met until they constitute an integral part of the total educational experience associated with study abroad. We wanted this volume to be more emphatic on these matters. If education abroad is a profession, then it has an obligation to inform its members on what constitutes excellence in the field. Respect for diversity of practices should not be an excuse for avoiding such a discussion. Education abroad practitioners should know what to strive for as they go about the business of designing and implementing programs.

(5) *How well does the volume meet the needs of different audiences: newcomers, mid-level professionals, and senior professionals?* The *Guide* is most suc-

cessful, in our view, at meeting the needs of newcomers to the field. First, it provides a wealth of information of most value to the entry-level person. Second, it is highly accessible to the reader, a matter of particular importance to newcomers. It makes few assumptions about the level of shared knowledge amongst the readers and it avoids jargon. Third, the appendices are particularly valuable. The resource appendix identifies some of the most important texts in the field, texts which should be in the library of the education abroad professional. The inclusion of the 1990 Task Force Report, *Getting on with the Task*, is also a valuable addition because it frames the issues and charts a course for the future in ways that the *Guide* generally does not.

Conversely, this volume is least satisfactory for experienced professionals. They were the ones who wrote the volume, but they are not the primary beneficiaries. The person looking for discussions of learning outcomes, institutional development, rationales for education abroad, and research findings will be disappointed.

In summary, the *Guide* succeeds very well in presenting a wealth of information to the education abroad practitioner. No other volume brings together so many topics and resource references in one place as well as this one. However, our biggest disappointment is that NAFSA apparently didn't commission this most talented and experienced group of authors to write about issues we believe all education abroad professionals need to know: best practices, ethical issues, current trends and future prospects, the major challenges facing the field, and conceptual rationales for doing what we are doing. What stands out for us as readers is that this is a complex field with a myriad of details to be learned and skills to acquire. What is missing is a compelling rationale of the larger purposes and reasons for doing this work in the first place. These are omissions that we hope will be remedied so that the next edition of the *Guide* will be able to provide leadership for all education abroad professionals well into the 21st Century.