

A Review of *Assessing Study Abroad*, edited by Savicki and Brewer

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Assessing Study Abroad: Theory, Tools, and Practice.
Savicki, V. & Brewer, E. (editors)
Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing. 2015. [344 pages]

Assessing Study Abroad, edited by Savicki and Brewer (2015), offers a critical examination into the assessment phenomenon that has emerged in the education abroad field in the last decade. The book is a collection of articles authored by over 25 practitioners, faculty, and researchers engaged in study abroad. Together the articles clarify and promote the practice of assessment within the education abroad context. The book offers a theory-to-practice oriented manual for U.S. faculty and administrators, international program staff, graduate students, and readers interested in better understanding the phenomenon of assessment.

The volume is organized in three parts, carrying readers from a broad overview of higher education assessment to specific case studies of assessment practices in education abroad. Each section of the volume is well supported with discussion, resources, and examples that contextualize assessment for international education faculty and practitioners.

Part I of this volume highlights the theory and background of assessment, including a brief overview of its history and evolution over time. The authors provide helpful insight into how assessment efforts in education abroad have emerged and expanded to their current state. The authors argue that assessing study abroad is an expected practice and ethical responsibility in the 21st century. Higher education institutions have a responsibility to gather information to inform continuous program improvement while demonstrating the impact and value of study abroad to external stakeholders.

The three chapters in Part I thoroughly unpack concepts of assessment, drawing lessons learned from psychology, sociology, and other academic disciplines to inform assessment efforts in education abroad. The authors define important terms (e.g. assessment, evaluation, measurement, etc.) and examine what in particular is being assessed in the education abroad context, with a specific emphasis on outcomes of student learning. Beyond synthesizing complex ideas into understandable concepts for a variety of stakeholders, the authors offer specific directives for advancing assessment efforts within education abroad. Importantly, they provide a strong rationale for moving away from assessing simple satisfaction. Rather, the authors emphasize assessment metrics that focus on student development outcomes as well as the impact of the program on partners and host

communities. The authors call for study abroad leaders to employ better assessment practices in order to meet high standards of accountability.

For readers ready to get started with assessment, Chapter 3 in Part I provides a detailed overview of how to design a plan and specific resources to get started with assessment. This is a helpful framework to consider when establishing a new assessment strategy or revising an outdated plan. Coupled with the resources in Part II of the book, “Tools and Strategies for Assessing Study Abroad,” the volume provides a full roadmap for designing and implementing a study abroad assessment plan. Part II of the book also provides rich resources and information to help in navigating data collection and analysis. Readers can explore the benefits and challenges of various methods of assessment, exploring examples of qualitative and quantitative assessment and mixed methods in a variety of institutional contexts. This section also touches upon advantages and drawbacks of creating local assessment tools versus adopting commercial tools.

For readers preferring more concrete examples over abstract concepts, Part III of the book offers ten case studies to showcase different approaches to tackling assessment. These case studies are drawn from many institutions, focus on different assessment interests, and take into consideration the practical limitations of time, expertise, funding, and buy-in from stakeholders. The case studies illustrate a range of assessment goals and provide valuable resources to inform the creation and implementation of a strong study abroad assessment plan. Readers will find tools and information on a variety of interests such as: study abroad assessment in liberal arts institutions, conducting longitudinal assessment, an overview of quantitative and qualitative assessment tools including rubrics, reflective writing, and other methods to help capture information about various aspects of student learning abroad from multiple perspectives.

A highlight of this volume is the candid nature in which assessment efforts, including failures, are presented. For example, in Part I, the reader will learn “Tips from the Trenches” (pp.74-77); and in Part III, the case studies frequently include valuable lessons learned. The authors share excellent tips and advice to help others avoid common pitfalls and challenges of assessment.

A follow-up to this volume might offer a closer look into the assessment culture of the United States and how this impacts host institutions, partners, and communities in which education abroad is delivered. This book is heavily focused on the U.S. institutional role in assessment, yet there often exists a tension between U.S. institutions and hosts when it comes to expectations and resources related to assessment. Chapter 15 provides some insight into this topic through case study discussion and examples of practice. Just as students are encouraged to explore and think critically about privilege and power in an international context, so too should international educators. Power dynamics can unfold when U.S. institutions establish learning outcomes for programs offered by non-U.S. educational partners. Some assumptions are made in considering what each institution involved can and cannot assess; and the role of partners, both international and domestic, is important to explore in greater depth. Part III does offer brief insight into these issues and several of the contributing authors share examples of practice that recognize the importance of structuring assessment that considers these visible and invisible cultural norms and expectations.

This book is a valuable resource for U.S. study abroad practitioners, from assessment novices to senior leaders with years of assessment experience, as well as for faculty leaders of study abroad.

International partners and providers of study abroad for U.S. students will also find this volume useful in understanding the assessment culture of study abroad and what may be expected in partnerships. Faculty members teaching assessment-focused courses related to international education will also find value in this text as a complement to assessment theory and research-oriented texts, as will graduate students in higher and international education degree programs. Overall, the text offers important insight about assessment and detailed examples of practice that highlight nuances of assessment from theory to practice and will serve as a valuable resource for stakeholders of education abroad who wish to optimize student learning and development.