

Learning Abroad Center

Review Process for LAC-Sponsored Study Abroad Programs

Evaluation of programs is a key component in any study abroad operation. To monitor and improve program quality, the Learning Abroad Center uses such tools as program director reports, review of syllabi and other written program materials, site visits (by Learning Abroad Center staff, University of Minnesota faculty, and education abroad professionals and faculty from partner institutions), and student program evaluations. The institution of a more formalized site review process reflects the recognition that the most thorough and comprehensive method of evaluating program quality is a systematic and periodic on-site review by knowledgeable education abroad professionals and faculty in accordance with accepted standard of good practice. The following guidelines provide a framework for conducting such reviews for Learning Abroad Center sponsored programs.

1. Purpose

The primary purpose of an on-site review is to evaluate and improve the program. A secondary purpose is to document program quality for audiences external to the Learning Abroad Center (LAC). A third purpose may occasionally arise when a program is in distress: to assess the possible need for personnel changes, or even to decide whether to continue offering the program.

2. Audiences

The main audiences for the review are the Learning Abroad Center, on-site program staff and faculty, and major partner institutions.

3. Programs to be reviewed under these guidelines

Regular on-site reviews will be scheduled only for study abroad programs sponsored by the Learning Abroad Center and offered on an ongoing basis. Evaluation processes for exchanges, cosponsored programs, custom programs and nonrecurring sponsored programs do not normally include an LAC-sponsored site visit by a review team.

4. Frequency and timing of reviews

Sponsored programs over which the Learning Abroad Center exercises primary control should normally receive a full review about every seven years. Such visits will normally involve at least three days on site, and more when the program format so counsels (e.g., when an MSID review team wishes both to observe classes and to visit internships). Less frequent reviews based on shorter visits may be appropriate for programs over which LAC has less control, notably those involving integrated study at an overseas university. The review cycle should remain somewhat flexible to maintain the possibility of combining a review with other activities (e.g., a CIEE conference or a scheduled trip for some other purpose), or visiting a distressed program ahead of its normal spot in the cycle. Normally a review team will not visit a new program until at least its third year of operation. Before any visit is scheduled, LAC will consult with on-site staff to assure timing that will facilitate the review process and minimize disruption to program activities.

5. Composition of review teams

Normally a review team will consist of two or three members. Each team will include one faculty member (whether from the University of Minnesota or another institution) and one LAC staff representative who is not a member of the responsible programming team. When a team has three members, the third could be another faculty member, an appropriate university staff member, a faculty member or study abroad professional from another institution, or someone else with relevant expertise. Under exceptional circumstances a review team might have more than three members.

6. Leadership responsibilities for review team visits

Organizing responsibilities for each review will be divided among the following three positions:

- a. *The review team Chair* is a review team member who is not from the LAC staff. The chair is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the review process and assuring that the final team report accurately represents findings.
- b. *The review team Coordinator* is the team member who is from the LAC staff but not from the responsible programming team. In consultation with the chair, the coordinator designs the evaluation, including pre-departure and on-site activities, and edits the report, and coordinates any follow-up determined to be necessary and appropriate.
- c. *An optional at large team Member* is a third review team member who will assist with assessment and may be a faculty member, staff member from Learning Abroad Center, an appropriate professional from another campus office, or a faculty member or study abroad professional from another institution. This team member may be chosen to provide expertise in a particularly relevant area.

The team of the program undergoing evaluation will also be asked to assign a staff member to assist with coordination, preparation, and logistics (transportation, lodging arrangements, etc.). Additionally, it may be determined appropriate in some circumstances for this or another program team member to accompany the review team to assist with meetings, etc, but not to serve as a member of the review team.

In addition, the on-site director, an on-site faculty member, an additional on-site staff member, and two students (ideally elected by their peers) should be made available to serve as local resources and be invited to attend selected meetings of the evaluation team while the group is on-site to offer feedback and perspective. (To guard against the possibility that no students will volunteer, future scholarship awards should include a note that the recipient might be called upon to participate in an on-site program review team.)

7. Pre-departure activities

The review team should hold at least one meeting well in advance of the trip to assure that all members understand its mission, to discuss logistics, and to set up a division of labor including writing responsibilities. (A review team member who works at a distant partner institution would be able to participate by conference call.) The review team chair, in consultation with the review team coordinator, will take the lead in assigning report roles, recommending activities, and confirming the final report conclusions. In addition, and also well before the trip, each team

member should be given, and asked to read key program materials including brochure, handbook(s), syllabi (if available), tabulated student evaluations, directors' Annual Program Reports, etc.

8. Dimensions to be considered

The review team should begin by considering the overall structure, mission, and rationale for the program. Who is the program designed to serve? Are their needs being met? Particular attention should be paid to programs designed to meet specific curricular or demographic needs. The team should be prepared to report on the program's success in terms of meeting the needs it has been developed to address and modifications or suggestions should keep programmatic mission in mind.

Each review team will consider at least the following:

a. Academic:

- Curriculum (coherence, appropriateness for program goals, strengths, gaps)
- Class size, faculty-student ratios
- Quality of classes/instruction
- Syllabi
- Contact hours and hours of student effort in relation to credits (including for internships)
- Evaluation methods for assessing student learning (exams, papers, oral presentations, etc.)
- Qualifications of faculty and staff
- Availability of appropriate academic documentation (syllabi, etc.) on the LAC website for use by potential applicants, academic advisers, etc.
- Library facilities
- Computer access
- On-site academic/registration advising
- Academic policies (e.g., drop-add, grading, etc.)
- CI considerations or curricular development
- Other related academic programs as appropriate (Custom, Global Seminars)

b. Non-academic:

- Housing
- Orientation
- Field trips and excursions
- Re-entry preparation
- On-site handbooks and other informational materials for students
- Pre-departure handbooks and other key informational materials
- On-site informational materials
- Annual program reports
- Adequacy of staffing
- Extracurricular opportunities
- Opportunities for integration into the host culture
- Psychological/health care access and services
- Emergency plans and procedures, including evacuation plans where appropriate
- Accessibility
- Diversity and support for student service needs (gender, sexuality, race, religion issues,

etc)

9. Activities to take place on-site

During the visit, each review team, or subgroups or individual members thereof, will:

- Hold introductory meeting with on-site program director
- Visit sample classes
- Visit sample housing and other program facilities
- Visit sample internship and/or community placement sites if applicable
- Visit associated orientation or cultural sites as appropriate
- Review CVs for faculty and staff
- Review on-site orientation format and content
- Interview program staff and internship team
- Interview selected faculty
- Interview selected students
- Visit any other persons or offices considered important (associated counseling, language, or disability services, etc.)
- Conduct other activities deemed essential to evaluating the particular program
- Hold exit interview with the on-site program director to discuss findings and recommendations and ask questions

10. Developing the report

Each member of the review team will bear lead responsibility for obtaining information for, and developing the first draft of, one or more sections of the report. The report will be organized into three sections: an executive summary, the body of the report itself, and any appendixes. When necessary, a separate, limited-distribution supplement can address sensitive matters, which most often concern personnel. The review team chair will provide overall coordination and will assure that each writer stays on task and respects deadlines. Each site visit schedule should include writing time for team members to draft portions of the report. A rough draft of the report will be completed before the team leaves the site. Subsequently the review team coordinator will integrate and edit the various pieces into one coherent document. The review team chair will oversee this process to assure that the report accurately reflects the team's assessment. Any other team members will be invited to provide feedback. Once consensus has been reached, all team members will be asked to sign off on the report. When consensus lacks on a particular point, a team member will have the right to insert a minority opinion. The final report will be submitted to the LAC Director no later than two weeks after the end date of the site visit.

11. Making the report official

The LAC Director will submit the final report to the Learning Abroad Center Advisory Council for feedback and formal acceptance of the report.

12. Distribution of the report

The full report, minus any supplements will be made available to key LAC staff, on-site staff, and the Learning Abroad Center Advisory Council. The executive summary will be available to all LAC staff. Supplements will go only to the responsible programming team, the LAC director, and others in LAC who need to know because of the nature of the particular issues. LAC will inform key partner institutions and departments that the report is available upon request but will not

post it on a publicly accessible web site. The timing of announcements to partners will depend on the content of the report. In some cases it could be available immediately upon acceptance of the report by the Learning Abroad Center Advisory Council, whereas in others LAC might wish to wait until a six-month progress report from our on-site staff can be sent as well (see item 13).

13. Follow-up

On-site staff will be asked to submit a formal progress report to the LAC Director, no later than six months after the end date of the site visit. When appropriate, progress towards addressing specific recommendations or suggestions from the Site Review Team should be folded into a site's annual report. LAC will draw on this and other sources of information to submit a report on implementation of the Site Review Recommendations to the Learning Abroad Center Advisory Council within a year after the visit. These reports should be available to anyone who receives the original report. Annual program reports by the program director should take into account all progress towards addressing issues raised in the site review, until such time as all recommendations have been satisfactorily addressed.