

Minutes of the March 26, 2009 Meeting of the International Education Committee

Present: Tristan Burger, Lynnette Claire, Lisa Ferrari, John Lear, Donn Marshall, Jannie Meisberger, Jan Moore, Mei Rose, Jonathan Stockdale, Peter Wimberger

Peter called meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.

Minutes from March 10, 2009 meeting were reviewed and approved with minor changes.

Single Deadline for Applications

The announcement about a single annual deadline for study abroad applications was sent to faculty advisors. The February 15 deadline will apply to study abroad programs beginning with Summer 2010. Jannie reported one expression of concern from a faculty member who was worried about the crush of having to write double the number of letters of recommendations at once with all students applying at one time for the year ahead. Jannie stated that she is working toward developing forms designed to decrease the effort required to complete the recommendations. Lynnette suggested, and others concurred, that there could be value in creating on-line forms, similar to those she is finding more frequently for grad school applications. It was noted that more extensive letters will still be required for those students who have grades that do not meet the minimum requirements.

Minimum GPA

Peter directed the committee conversation to the topic of minimum GPA, returning to the question discussed by IEC in October 2008. Peter recommended that we now limit the discussion to programs other than UPS sponsored programs including Pac Rim, Kyoto, Dijon, Taiwan, and Oaxaca. Jannie clarified that these programs are ones with which Puget Sound has a special relationship because we have faculty members directly involved.

Lynnette asked if we would be considering short term study abroad programs. Jan pointed out that these are not for credit, thus not within IEC purview.

Peter asked if we should also limit the discussion by not considering summer programs. Summer programs were excluded from consideration of a minimum GPA requirement other than the program specified minimum GPA.

It was clarified that an international study experience is not required of all language majors.

Peter reported on a conversation with a Department Chair who was under the impression that Puget Sound did have a 3.0 GPA requirement for study abroad and expressed surprise at some students in his department who were studying abroad, since they would not have met that GPA requirement.

Lynnette commented that she sees value in having a student who is struggling with academics stay on campus in order to benefit from the relatively strong support structures.

Jonathan commented that it might be valuable to consider on what justification we would base a GPA minimum requirement, noting that the original SAWG reasoning that it might help cap the costs to the university do not seem to bear out given the very few students who actually have to petition the requirement. It was noted that in the study year only 13 of 122 studying abroad had under a 3.0 GPA, and it is anticipated that many of those would apply with a GPA lower than 3.0 would get approved on appeal.

Jan noted that having the single application deadline would make it harder for students who have one tough semester early in their careers here to pick their GPA up to 3.0 in time for the February 15 deadline in their sophomore year. Others noted that study abroad requires good advising from very early on.

Peter reviewed MIRS reports looking into GPAs by majors and grades by department and found they vary widely (over 0.5 grade point). He therefore questioned the equity of utilizing a GPA minimum, since such a rule would bias against students who take courses that have lower average grades. He noted that the university does not have data that suggest there are differences in GPA based on ethnicity here at Puget Sound, but was concerned that if disparities among socioeconomic groups persist into college that some of our students might unintentionally be prevented from studying abroad. Others noted that it is reasonable to assume that students who come to Puget Sound with less strong high school preparation will be at a disadvantage. Lynnette added concern that first generation college student would be disadvantaged.

Jonathan stated that he leans toward not adopting a policy requiring a minimum GPA for study abroad.

Jannie recommended that IEC formally adopt the policy that we already implement informally. That is, Jannie recommends that IEC formally require that students meet that minimum GPAs required by the programs to which they apply.

Mei asked about the chances of a student getting admitted to programs if they do not meet the stated minimum GPA. Jan responded that it depends on space available within programs, adding that with the current economics at play, more spaces are likely to be available.

Jonathan noted that although IEC may elect to not set a minimum GPA, that is not the same as staying we have not made a decision, and that distinction should be made in our end of year report to the Faculty Senate.

It was agreed that Jannie would draft language proposing IEC policy regarding minimum GPA, reflecting that students are expected to meet the GPA requirements of programs to which they apply.

Residency Requirement

It was noted that it is not in the IEC purview to make policy about residency requirements. Those policy decisions are likely to be addressed by either ASC or Curriculum. However, IEC may want to make a recommendation to one of those committees. This is to be discussed at the next IEC meeting.

Other

Jan reported that several new student program reviews have come in, some of which are concerning to the International Programs office staff. Jonathan noted that some programs that IEC has approved in the last year are identified as needed a follow up review in the next year, and that these student reviews will be valuable in those considerations. Peter added that IEC may consider further program cuts.

There was brief discussion about creating a template which would provide IEC information about which international study programs meet needs of majors within each department.

Respectfully submitted,
Donn Marshall

Notes from Lisa Ferrari Forum on Education Abroad February 18-20, 2009 Portland, Oregon

In general, I found this to be a lively professional meeting. The discussions of professional issues were thoughtful and analytical, with nicely incorporated practical exercises. I would recommend this event to any faculty member interested in understanding more about international education and the work of international education professionals.

The plenary sessions were less helpful than the panel discussions, although the lunch plenary with student speakers was a notable exception. The students presented original research that they had conducted during their study abroad experiences. The projects were uniformly strong and came from students representing a variety of majors. It was wonderful to see how studying abroad added a new dimension to students' understanding of their purpose in college.

Below I summarize key points from the panel discussions I attended.

“Short But Sweet: Preventing Faculty-Led, Short-Term Programs from Going Sour”

One theme was the importance of a strong relationship between faculty and offices such as our Office of International Programs. This relationship is critical to the success of short-term programs. One of the biggest problems in planning short-term programs is how to prepare faculty members to be successful program leaders. Many faculty members do not or cannot anticipate the difference between leading a short-term study abroad program and teaching a class of the same duration and on the same material. Successful short-term programs have a thoughtful student orientation that goes beyond advice about what to pack. Orientation should emphasize learning in advance of arrival. One panelist offered the example of a student who wistfully observed, after a short-term visit to Russia, that she thought she had missed more than she had seen. She wished she had been offered more context (cultural, historical, political, etc.) for both contemporary Russia and for the specific destinations of the trip.

“Short-Term Models: Strategic Planning for the Other Half”

The panelists pointed out that short-term study abroad is on the rise, and that it places different demands on faculty, students, and administrators alike, as compared to traditional semester or year programs. 55% of U.S. students studying abroad do so on short-term programs, most of which are run by the institutions themselves, rather than third-party providers. This means that a strong relationship is necessary between the sending and receiving institutions. Expectations for types and levels of student work need to be made explicit. Norms will vary in important ways from country to country, even though overall standards are high in both countries. As in the previous panel, these panelists articulated the need for a strong partnership between faculty and international education offices. Faculty need to have a strong motivation, and maintaining that motivation requires administrative support. Faculty need orientation at least as much as students do.

“Testing the Ethics: Case Studies in the Application of the Forum *Code of Ethics*”

The presenter described deontological and consequentialist ethical systems and then asked us to consider those approaches when dealing with a hypothetical study abroad situation of ethical ambiguity. For example, my group had to decide, while adopting roles as various administrators, whether to pay a bribe to a local official in order to keep our program’s overseas headquarters open. The discussion with colleagues was interesting and very informative. It suggested angles to the question and responsibilities that I had not considered. I must admit, as someone who has often taught ethics, that the ethics lesson at the beginning of the presentation could use some work. For that reason, I

left the session once the group exercise was done and the presenter was back to watering down Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham. Instead, I went to:

“Including Students with Disabilities in Study Abroad”

This panel was highly informative for people like me with no idea of the scope of issues and resources relevant to people with disabilities who study abroad. One of the presenters was from Mobility International USA, an organization devoted to the needs of people with a variety of disabilities. We discussed the particular needs of students with physical disabilities and the types of planning that might assist them. We also discussed the potential needs of students with learning or mental health disabilities. These are the groups of disabled students that are currently growing the fastest and therefore are increasingly demanding services. The website for Mobility International is www.miusa.org. The panelists provided us with a “tip sheet” from Mobility International entitled “Steps to Take to Include Students with Disabilities,” and had many other handouts and materials available. My impression was that the organization is eager to work with educators on study abroad issues for disabled students.

“Diversity and Under-representation in Study Abroad”

This panel articulated many of the needs of the diversity of students (including, for example, ethnic and racial minorities, first-generation college students, returning students, and students with children) in studying abroad. A primary means of conveying this information was a short video presentation from Cal State Northridge. Individual students gave their accounts of deciding to study abroad and their impressions upon returning. The accounts had three common elements: almost all students needed an initial “push” even to imagine themselves as people who could study abroad, many needed assistance negotiating the pragmatics of studying abroad, and all of the students experienced a strong sense of alienation/separation from their study abroad peers during the first part of their programs. These student accounts were by far the most valuable parts of the panel. I would have welcomed some framework or articulated characterization of the needs of a diverse study abroad population.