GUIDELINES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD
ABOUT THE FORUM ON EDUCATION ABROAD

The Forum on Education Abroad is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, membership association recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission as the Standards Development Organization (SDO) for the field of education abroad. The Forum’s institutional members include U.S. colleges and universities, overseas institutions, consortia, agencies, provider organizations and foundations.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Forum on Education Abroad serves as the collective voice of U.S. post-secondary education abroad. To benefit students, The Forum develops and disseminates comprehensive standards of good practice, resources and training, advocates for education abroad and its value, and engages the field in critical dialogue.
GUIDELINES FOR
LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD

A companion to the Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad
INTRODUCTION

Developing proficient language skills can be a gratifying and beneficial experience for students both personally and professionally. In the areas of business, peace and conflict resolution, and national security, proficiency in languages other than English is recognized as valuable for diplomacy and global competitiveness. Education abroad can offer a rich environment for developing language skills within a physical and cultural context where the target language is spoken. Because language and culture are remarkably intertwined with one another, language study and education abroad experiences should be complementary; when leveraged, the cultural context abroad deepens meaning and understanding of the target language and language learning deepens cultural understanding.

Language learning opportunities abroad can serve students at all language levels from beginner instruction to advanced immersion. They can be incorporated into education abroad experiences in a variety of ways:

- As the primary focus of coursework;
- As a course on language basics for students whose academic focus is in another discipline, but who nevertheless are studying in a country where languages other than English are spoken;
- Through integrated university study where the target language is the language of instruction in the classroom; and
- As a tool for practical experiences that apply language usage, e.g., in internship or community engagement experiences.

Alongside formal instruction and program activities, informal communication, socialization, and interaction in the target language support language learning abroad in ways not possible on a home campus.

Regardless of the level or format, language-learning experiences abroad should take advantage of the unparalleled opportunities to engage students in language and its associated culture(s). The home institution, host institution or organization, faculty at home and abroad, and students themselves should work together to establish clear goals and expectations for language learning outcomes, facilitate and foster open communication and interaction with local individuals, and set the stage for continued language learning and usage long after the education abroad experience has ended.

These Guidelines are meant to help these stakeholders collaborate to achieve their common goals by offering advice for addressing the specific needs and challenges presented by language learning abroad. Use them in conjunction with the Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad.
STANDARDS

The Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad were established in 2004 by The Forum on Education Abroad, recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission as the Standards Development Organization (SDO) for the field of education abroad. They are higher education’s benchmark for education abroad program excellence and accountability.

KEY TERMS

language program: a study abroad program whose primary purpose is language instruction; includes such variants as language institutes, language-focused programs for non-host nationals at host universities, and language-focused programs run by U.S. universities

home institution: college or university where a student is pursuing their degree of study

host institution: the institution that the education abroad student attends while abroad

program sponsor: the institution or organization that is the primary administrator and manager of an education abroad program

integrated university study: a study abroad program type in which the predominant study format is participation in standard courses of study alongside degree-seeking students from the host university; may be via either direct enrollment or enrollment facilitated by a study abroad provider organization

target language: the language a student is learning or intends to learn

language of instruction: the primary language in which a course is conducted/taught

heritage speaker/heritage learner: a person who speaks or is studying a language “who has some proficiency in or a cultural connection to that language through family, community, or country of origin;” heritage learners’ levels can vary widely in terms of oral proficiency, literacy, and connection to the language and culture, and they often have different needs than students studying the language as a foreign language.

1, 3 Definition adapted from The Forum’s Glossary, https://forumea.org/resources/glossary/.
2 Often, the home or host institution will also serve the role of program sponsor. In other cases, a third-party program provider organization serves as sponsor.
4 As defined by the Center for Applied Linguistics, http://www.cal.org/heritage/research/faqs.html#2
BEST PRACTICES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD

Successful language learning experiences abroad are focused on providing students with support and encouragement that allows them to make the most of opportunities to engage with the target language in a variety of ways and with a variety of people. Moreover, language-focused experiences abroad set clear goals for what a student can expect to achieve with their language study through the education abroad experience and prepare students to continue their language growth and development after the program has ended. The following best practices can help achieve these goals.

a. Create and encourage opportunities for use of and experimentation with the target language as often as possible for students of all skill levels.

b. Encourage language instructors and education abroad administrators at the home campus and on-site to collaborate to support student advancement towards goals.

c. Align language-learning opportunities abroad to the goals of the home institution and academic departments.

d. Provide frequent opportunities for students to engage with local individuals and use the target language in different contexts and with a variety of people.

e. Offer a variety of learning support options for learners at all levels of proficiency, i.e., tutors, textbooks, online learning.

f. Encourage and empower students to make responsible choices that will benefit their language learning goals, e.g., preferring communication in the target language and travel to regions where the target language is spoken.

g. Recognize and validate language as a reflection and carrier of cultural values and perspectives, past and present, as well as individual identities.

h. Explore regional varieties of the target language.

i. Explore social varieties of the target language and when it is appropriate to use them; encourage students to have contact with and practice these various forms of expression:
   - Differences in the way different genders, generations, and minority groups in the region use language; and differences in the way local speakers may use language to describe people’s identities, e.g., gender, sexual preference, etc.
• Variations in language use in different cultural and social contexts;
• Similarities and differences of regional accents or forms of usage;
• Rules of etiquette and politeness, formal interactions, honorifics, signs of respect;
• Awareness of slang terms, colloquial language, and insults;
• Body language and gesturing.

j. Help students understand constraints that may apply to them as foreign speakers when using different forms or dialects of the target language, e.g., that expressions used by locals may be offensive when used by a foreign speaker.

k. Build awareness in students of the role and perception of their native tongue(s) in the host community.

l. Where two or more languages are spoken in a community, provide additional instruction, resources, and support to help students navigate the additional layers of complexity this may present.

m. Before, during, and after the experience, guide and encourage students to reflect on how their education abroad experience has shaped their language development and sociocultural awareness, and contributed to their academic, professional, and personal goals.

n. Empower students to maintain contact with speakers of the target language and to continue their use of the language after their education abroad experience has ended.

o. Familiarize students with the culture and context of communities in the U.S. in which the target language may be spoken.
GUIDELINES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD

Use the following guidelines, along with the Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad, when developing and evaluating language learning courses or programs abroad and/or vetting potential partners.

1. MISSION AND GOALS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD

- Set language learning goals appropriate to the programs’ goals and to the mission of the institution or organization offering the program.
  - Set specific goals for speaking, listening, reading, and writing in the target language.5
- When language learning is not the primary goal of the program, offer opportunities for the development of basic skills in the language or languages of the host community.

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2. STUDENT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD

- Encourage program staff, faculty, resident advisors, and host families (if applicable) to communicate with students in the target language.

- Provide encouragement and logistical support to facilitate regular student interaction with local individuals and use of the target language in a wide range of contexts in the local community.
  - Offer extracurricular activities that encourage or require use of the target language.
  - Facilitate activities to link students with their peers in the host community, e.g. social activities, classes attended together, peer mentors, or resident advisors.
  - Organize opportunities for students to interact with a variety of people from diverse social and ethnic groups.

- Provide ways for students to periodically self-assess their engagement and motivation and the impact these can have on their learning.

- Guide students to reflect on their interactions with the host community and cultural differences and/or implications that arise during those interactions.

- Use the language classroom as an opportunity to debrief the challenges and successes students experience from living in a new culture and using their language skills outside the classroom.

- Accommodate the unique learning and support needs of heritage speakers of the target language.
3. ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD

- Use a range of assessment strategies to track students’ language learning progress and provide constructive, timely feedback to students on their progress.

- Offer opportunities for students to understand and interpret written language on a variety of topics appropriate to their language level and their program of study.

- Make use of the unique opportunities at the on-site location of the program to access local resources and bring students into contact with speakers of the target language.

- Establish clear and transparent policies and procedures for credit and grade transfer for courses taken at a host institution, including integrated university classes with local students where the target language is the language of instruction but may not be the subject of study.
4. STUDENT SELECTION, PREPARATION, AND ADVISING FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD

- Advise students on language learning opportunities considering each student’s language proficiency, motivation, and academic and career goals.
- Communicate language proficiency requirements for eligibility for each course or program.
- Place students in appropriate courses based on reliable testing instruments and other assessment sources, such as course grades, essays, and interviews.
- Minimally, provide basic language training for all students to prepare them for everyday needs in the host context, e.g., taking a taxi, ordering a meal, exchanging money.
- Orient students to the differences in classroom cultures and language pedagogy styles between their home institution and the host context.
- Prepare students for the intensive experience of speaking and studying the target language more than they are accustomed to at their home institution.
- Help students to understand that speakers of the target language in the host community may not be prepared to accommodate their learner status; provide tools and tips that will empower students to successfully navigate conversations outside the classroom.
- Inform students of opportunities to stay engaged with proficient speakers of the target language upon return to their home institution.
5. **STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY MEASURES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD**

- If students are asked to commit to a language use pledge or policy, make that policy accessible and transparent to students in the application process; clearly identify consequences for violation of this policy. (Exceptions should be made in cases of emergency.)
- Clearly explain to students the rationale for limiting the use of English during the program.
- Ensure that language use policies and procedures are fairly and consistently implemented and enforced.
6. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNNG ABROAD

- Establish clear and transparent policies for sharing language assessment and placement test results with students, on-site instructors and staff, and the student’s home institution.
  - Ensure that placement and language assessment reports respect home institution policies for protecting student privacy.
- Ensure that staff and instructors model the language use policy consistently and provide students with the necessary support to comply with the policy.
7. ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROGRAM RESOURCES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD

- Ensure that students have adequate access to resources appropriate for foreign language learning and the development of intercultural skills.
- Provide students with housing options that facilitate exposure to and use of the target language.
- Make individual or small-group tutors available to students requiring additional practice or instruction.
- Where applicable, ensure that peer mentors and resident advisors receive formal training on how to support students and facilitate language acquisition.
- Regularly evaluate peer mentors, resident advisors, tutors, host families, language instructors, etc.
8. HEALTH, SAFETY, SECURITY, AND RISK MANAGEMENT FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD

- Educate students about the additional stress that can be triggered by living and learning in another language and their responsibility for maintaining their personal well-being.

- Provide students with training in specific vocabulary in the target language necessary for accessing emergency services.
9. ETHICS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING ABROAD

- Consider the impact of student presence on local and organizational resources, economic conditions and social, cultural, and political hierarchies.
  - Make efforts to limit the negative effects of this presence.
- Provide students with information related to language hierarchies and stigmas; prepare them to be respectful and courteous to local individuals regardless of the language variety they speak.
- Sensitize students to the cultural, economic, or ideological importance of certain languages or language varieties in the host community.
- Educate students on the role language can play in colonialism and cultural appropriation.
- If desired by the program sponsor or host institution, seek to create mutually beneficial language experiences for both education abroad and local students by offering structured opportunities for host students to practice English with their counterparts from U.S. institutions.
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