

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

October 1, 2007

TO: Jeffrey Armstrong, Dean

RE: **Creating the Next Generation of Study Abroad Efforts in CANR**

FROM: Rick Bernsten, Tracy Dobson, Eunice Foster, Frances Kaneene, Michelle Owens, Rick Paulsen, Karen Plaut, Paul Roberts, and Frank Fear (chair)

Background

The purpose of this report is to share assessments and recommendations for improving CANR's study abroad endeavors. Ideas for this report emerged from conversations among CANR colleagues – selected by Senior Associate Dean Frank Fear and organized as a task force – that took place during Fall Semester 2006 and Spring Semester 2007. Frank convened the task force recognizing that this is a time of transition: Rhonda Crackel was scheduled to succeed Paul Roberts as CANR Study Abroad director on September 1 2007.

Committee participants included Rick Bernsten (AEC), Tracy Dobson (FW), Eunice Foster (CANR OASA, CSS), Frances Kaneene (CARRS), Michelle Owens (IIA), Rick Paulsen (CARRS), and Karen Plaut (ANS). Members were selected on the basis of international and study abroad experience, perspective on strategic assessment-visioning, and diversity of position – including student advising, faculty engagement, unit administration, and college administration. Paul and Frank served on the committee. Frank facilitated committee discussions and wrote this report, connecting it thematically to broader international planning efforts underway in the College.

The report is written as a memorandum to you, as dean of the college. With your authorization, which we received in Summer Semester 2007, our intent is to share this report broadly – in the College and across the university – for the purpose of stimulating discussion about what we consider to be an important and timely subject. Frank, Eunice, and Rhonda will be responsible for implementing the outcomes of this initiative.

Study Abroad as an Expression of Scholarship

From our perspective, great progress has been made at MSU and in CANR during the past decade “growing the program” in terms of the number of study abroad experiences offered, the number of students involved, and the number of faculty members participating. We take great pride in what has been accomplished: after all, in terms of magnitude MSU is ranked as the #1 public university in the country.



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With an impressive foundation in place, we are ready to move to the next phase of development – what we call “*the next generation of study abroad efforts.*” To make that move we believe it is important to supplement an emphasis on study abroad *as a program* (i.e., as a curricular offering to be designed and managed) with an emphasis on study abroad *as a scholarly expression* (i.e., as an expression of faculty work in departments, schools, and other academic units).

While we recognize that there are significant challenges associated with identifying, organizing, offering, and sustaining study abroad efforts – from designing curricular offerings to managing budgets – those challenges cannot be the primary focus of attention at an institution occupying Michigan State’s academic standing. While all study abroad efforts need to be undertaken in a *scholarly* manner – that is, drawn on leading-edge knowledge with material presented in thoughtful, creative, thought-provoking, and meaningful ways – it is less clear when, how, and to what extent our study abroad work is an expression of *scholarship*.

Any endeavor labeled as “scholarship” – irrespective of field or focus (including study abroad) – shares a core characteristic: *discovering or creating something fresh and new that advances work in a field – in theory and/or practice – the outcomes of which are peer-reviewed and shared through a variety of academically-endorsed outlets.* At issue for advancing study abroad in the next generation of effort is expanding our focus—from an institution that is known for “doing study abroad” to a place that is known for *producing scholarship about study abroad* – in the disciplines, professions, and interdisciplinary fields, including the theory and practice of study abroad as an important and distinct scholarly endeavor.

An analogue of what might emerge in CANR’s study abroad effort is the work done by CANR faculty members in the domain of cooperative learning (with special reference to endeavors in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife), where the application of cooperating learning (and related pedagogies) has become a focus of scholarship as expressed through project work, conference presentations, peer-reviewed publications, and course offerings.

Advancing study abroad as an expression of scholarship is necessary in a university setting. Indeed, a question for discussion during our deliberations was: “What does a study abroad program look like at a place like MSU – a research-intensive, land grant institution with global obligations?” Another way of phrasing this question is: “What differentiates study abroad programs at an institution like MSU vis-à-vis study abroad programs that are offered by other types of institutions, such as liberal arts colleges?” We believe one answer is scholarship.

Valuing and Rewarding Faculty Participation in Study Abroad

Achieving the vision we advance will require changing the way that study abroad efforts are perceived, generally – *from* a program to be organized and offered *to* an expression of a faculty member’s program of scholarship. Currently, it is not apparent to us that study abroad participation “counts

much” in the faculty reward system. For example, those of us with experience in Promotion and Tenure reviews recognize that tenure-system faculty members do not always feature study abroad involvements when presenting their portfolios for review. At the same time, we are struck by the number of study abroad experiences offered by fixed-term faculty members and academic specialists. While we in no way diminish the contributions made by these colleagues – they do wonderful and important work – we also wonder if their involvement to some extent represents “off loading” study abroad from tenure-system faculty, particularly for junior colleagues. For example, we know that some junior colleagues have been advised by senior colleagues to refrain from participating in study abroad efforts until they achieve tenure; to do otherwise would be “hazardous to their academic health,” they are advised.

To counter this attitude and to elevate study abroad as bona fide and equivalent “faculty work,” we need to infuse study abroad with opportunities for producing the kinds of academic products that are expected of faculty and valued at a tier-one academic institution. Achieving that goal will require a new approach to planning study abroad efforts – at the unit and college levels.

Study Abroad Planning at the School- Department & College Level

Most study abroad offerings are the outcome of individual (or team) initiative – often in response to perceived opportunities. While there is much to be said for this approach, at issue is what a system looks like – over time – when it is developed that way. In many respects, CANR study abroad offerings have developed in a generally ad hoc way. The outcome is not the product of a “grand plan”; for the most part it is the cumulative effect of independent decisions and actions.

There is nothing necessarily wrong with this outcome, one reason being that study abroad (in at least one framing of it) is a market system with “sellers” (i.e., academic units with faculty members offering experiences) and “buyers” (i.e., students weighing options based on a variety of factors, including cost, location, degree relevance). If there are sufficient buyers in the marketplace, a program can be offered and sustained.

However, another way of framing the system currently is that in relatively few cases (either at the unit or college level) are these decisions the outcome of strategic decision making – about what to offer, where, and how. For example, we could (but rarely) ask: “*Where in the world should we be working and on what topics?*” Furthermore, when one analyzes our study abroad offerings it is not always apparent how offerings relate to department-school or college goals; how study abroad contributes to a broader vision for internationalizing the student experience; and how study abroad fits into an international-global strategy across the mission.

Because our approach has been more ad hoc than strategic, it might be said that CANR does **not** have a study abroad *program* in the way that term is commonly used: an organized approach with a preferred set of goals, objectives, and outcomes. Rather, what exists currently is a *portfolio* of study

abroad offerings. That outcome is a reasonable outcome in relationship to the prevailing approach to study abroad development at MSU – an approach framed and driven by former President McPherson: grow the size of the program. Given that approach, the role of the CANR Study Abroad office (to date) has been to enable and facilitate the development of *new* study abroad offerings, especially in unaddressed countries or topics or in offering longer-term options – in other words, “to grow the portfolio.”

While there is no question that benefits have accrued from efforts undertaken during this build-up phase (e.g., a large number of faculty and students have experienced study abroad), we also believe that the singular focus on a “growth approach” is neither sustainable nor appropriate in the long term. In fact, we see a number of negative outcomes (e.g., some at MSU – including faculty colleagues – do not believe study abroad experiences have much educational value or consider it “legitimate” faculty work).

With that in mind, we recommend “shifting gears” with an eye toward achieving *greater focus with pre-determined, collective intent*. One way to achieve that goal is to be crystal clear about the outcome that we have in mind. For us, that outcome is clear: *to weave study abroad into the fabric of academic work at the unit and College levels*. To do that, we need to move the system *from ad hoc status (i.e., study abroad offerings largely developed one by one) to a set of offerings that is a more deliberate and integrated expression of collective intent – in the academic units and at the College level*. If that happens, then over time CANR will no longer have a study abroad portfolio; it will have a study abroad *program*.

To achieve that vision, we believe that *a set of core planning questions need to be answered in each academic unit – by at least those who are globally engaged and interested in undergraduate education – and at the College level*. *The answers will be used as a platform for evaluating the current study abroad portfolio and planning new offerings*. Planning questions might include:

- Where in the world should we be offering study abroad experiences? On what subjects? By which faculty?
- What do we hope to accomplish from and through study abroad offerings?
- How does global experience and study abroad fit into and contribute to the overall undergraduate learning experience?
- How can we connect study abroad offerings to research and outreach-engagement efforts?
- What are best case examples of study abroad efforts, activities, and outcomes?

The answers to these and other questions – as they emerge from unit conversations – will be *discussed at the College level by members of a new committee, the CANR Study Abroad Advisory Committee (SAAC)*. This committee will include faculty, staff and students representing CANR academic and related units (e.g., the Institute of International Agriculture); and the committee will be chaired by the CANR Director of Study Abroad Programs.

The outcomes of Committee discussions and deliberations will help define the College's study abroad program and inform its administration, including the allocation of resources. In turn, what is decided at the College level will be shared with academic and related units – to be drawn upon in future planning endeavors at the unit level.

The planning approach proposed here is *grounded* (with high levels of participation), *interactive* (among participants across the College), and *iterative* (connecting unit and College plans). It is intended to be a “gentle” but intentional way to bring greater clarity and focus to CANR's study abroad program.

Some Ways to Improve Our Programs

Discussions at the unit and College level will no doubt lead to identifying ways to improve the system, just as did conversations in our task force. Examples of system improvement ideas we discussed in our group include:

1. Pull together and disseminate to students and parents material that indicates just how much employers' value study abroad experiences. Emphasize in marketing the significant personal growth that students typically experience (student testimonials).
2. Recognize study abroad participation at graduation (e.g., students wear mini-flags of countries in which they studied); and include study abroad as a topic in annual evaluation sessions with department chairs and school directors; and recognize high-performing/innovative departments at the annual CANR faculty meeting.
3. Set targets for study abroad participation in each unit and at the college level. Fix a timetable for achieving the targets.
4. Enable study abroad experiences to fulfill curricular requirements for every CANR major. When applicable, allow ISB/ISS/IAH credits in study abroad.
5. Establish scholarships and endowments to support study abroad participation; and post information about those scholarships on the CANR web site.
6. Provide more financial assistance to support study abroad programs, generally; and encourage participation in semester-long programs by providing participating students with larger scholarships.
7. Develop a system that allows easier transfer of courses/credits from other countries so that students can more easily spend a semester abroad. This includes permitting departments to allow courses to transfer more easily if they are not exactly the same. Generally, make the approval and transferring of courses a less labor-intensive and frustrating process for students and advisors.
8. Make it financially viable for CANR faculty, grad students (the next generation of faculty), and Extension Educators to lead study abroad programs.

9. Include study abroad courses as part-of-load when assigning tenure-system faculty teaching load.
10. Hold an annual study abroad workshop for department advisors to orient them to available CANR programs. Solicit their thoughts regarding constraints to study abroad participation and, together, find ways to address those constraints.
11. Help academic advisors learn how to help students package their study abroad experiences to enhance student resumes and students' job interview experiences.
12. Include study abroad recognition on students' transcripts.
13. Offer pre-field orientation sessions and a post-field re-engagement course for all students that enroll in CANR-offered study abroad programs.
14. Institute a requirement for an "international experience" for each CANR student in the form of a study abroad experience, specific on-campus courses with global content, or foreign language proficiency.
15. Require all CANR majors to complete an international requirement for graduation in one of the following ways: take several approved international courses on campus; participate in a semester-length study abroad program; engage in an international "shadowing" (of faculty) experience; participate in international service-learning and internships; or participate in two, short-term study abroad programs.
16. Revise CANR degree curriculums so that students are offered a choice to complete some requirements by using study abroad courses. (It is easier to justify the high-cost of study abroad when meeting a degree requirement than taking study abroad courses as electives. In most CANR degree programs, study abroad offerings are treated as electives.)
17. Define a framework for the undergraduate study abroad experience that allows the flexibility that has been the hallmark of our programs, but also provides criteria that are used to evaluate the experience. As the framework is developed, some of the things that should be addressed are: How will the students be engaged in the country rather than "just visiting?" In what type of scholarly activities will they be engaged? What will they learn about the country?
18. Develop more study abroad programs that are linked directly with institutions/universities abroad. Currently, MSU and CANR have too many programs that are dependent on MSU faculty. We are often challenged to sustain programs when faculty members leave MSU or choose to do something else.
19. Evaluate course offerings available at various international universities to identify semester-long "course blocks" that can be used by CANR students to fulfill MSU requirements.
20. Ensure that programs across the College are offered in locations where CANR has had an historic presence, namely, Africa, India, and Latin America. This includes doing a better job of aligning CANR international projects with study abroad offerings. Include undergraduate experiences in project proposals, where applicable.

Internationalizing the Student Experience

An issue for our discussion—almost from the outset of task force deliberations—was whether the frame of reference should be study abroad or a more encompassing frame of reference—internationalizing the student experience. In the end we settled on study abroad for practical reasons: it is a program with organizational structures at the College and university levels. Because of that, we believe study abroad represents “lower hanging fruit” for institutional change.

However, we also believe that study abroad is a necessary but not sufficient topic within a framework of internationalizing the student experience at MSU. Given that conclusion, we spent time in our task force discussing how to help students gain capacity in dimensions necessary for functioning effectively and exerting leadership in a global environment. With that in mind, *we believe now is the time for the College to identify core global competencies; to put in place initiatives (existing and new) designed to help students gain core competencies; to monitor how well these initiatives are working; and to improve the system over time.* We referred to this approach as *putting in place a floor (with core competencies); establishing a baseline (with programmatic initiatives); and making incremental progress (through monitoring and measuring outcomes).*

We were less in agreement about how to accomplish what we propose. Having said that, know that there was considerable interest among task force members in *establishing a college-level internationalization specialization*, available to all undergraduate CANR students, perhaps required of them. The specialization could include

- a portfolio of internationally-relevant experiences, including study abroad (perhaps with pre-field and post-field learning experiences for students across programs)
- international engagement opportunities (tied especially to CANR research and development projects)
- internships and related field placements (with public, nonprofit, and corporate partners), and
- language proficiency.

At the very least, we believe it would be a good idea to test out the idea across the College—with academic governance; with faculty, staff, and students; and with unit and college-level administrators. Testing out this idea could be pursued in conjunction with vetting this report.

Final Observations

Broad-based reaction to the ideas contained in this report will help you—as dean—decide what in this report merits application. It is our hope that what we have proposed will stimulate thinking and action in ways that disrupt the status quo.

If it so chose, CANR could focus attention on improving what we are doing already, that is, to “do things better.” From our perspective, it is time to “do better things.”

We believe it is time for change.

Addendum

TYPES OF STUDENT INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Students may engage in a broad array of international experiences as part of their academic programs at MSU.

Faculty Led Programs- Mostly short-term programs, but may be up to a semester in length, in which an MSU faculty member develops, directs and conducts the program on site with students.

Non-Faculty Led Programs-

1. Exchange Program- a study abroad program in which an MSU student enrolls directly in a foreign university, and a student from that university enrolls at MSU. A written and signed agreement must be in place before an exchange program can begin.
2. Direct Enrollment Program-a study abroad program which MSU has officially approved as one of its own programs in which an MSU student is directly enrolled in a foreign university, and no student from that university enrolls at MSU in exchange.
3. Consortial or Provider Program- a study abroad program, which MSU has officially approved and makes available to its students, but which is arranged and administered by an organization other than MSU.
4. MSU-Administered Non-Faculty Led Program- a study abroad program which MSU arranges and administers, but which does not involve a regular MSU faculty member teaching on site on the program, nor accompanying the students for the majority of the program. These programs usually involve temporary or adjunct faculty from the host institution, under contract with MSU

Internships- Much broader than study abroad, an internship is a supervised professional experience in agencies, institutions and businesses related to the student’s major or career goals.

International Student Engagement and Service-Learning- Also broader than study abroad, service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. In some forms, students are empowered to take full responsibility for designing and implementing projects. In other forms, they work collaboratively with local partners in development projects.