Notes: Assessment of Foreign Language and Area Studies Programs panel for the IEPS International Education Forum, February 22, 2008
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Background on what we are assessing

■ **Application of learning outcomes and assessment to internationalization.**

Many institutions have articulated the goal of producing "globally competent graduates", but few have clearly defined what this means or how they will know when they have achieved this goal. Success is most often measured in terms of the level of activity, or the "inputs" to international learning. The unanswered question on most campuses concerns how international programs and courses (inputs) affect student learning (outcomes).

Applying student learning outcomes and assessment to internationalization is a relatively recent practice. The institutional benefits to engaging in this work include: demonstrating student international learning; improving curriculum and programs; bringing greater coherence and clearer direction to an institution's internationalization efforts With these objectives in mind, the American Council on Education engaged in a three-year project funded by FIPSE to advance the assessment of international learning with the long-term goal of improving student international learning at U.S. higher education institutions. The project group comprised six institutions with a commitment to internationalization. Together, the project group developed and piloted a student survey/ePortfolio approach.

What are we assessing?

■ **Various Combinations of Collegiate International Learning Experiences**

Student international learning results from multiple learning experiences before and during college. Our goal in developing and implementing an international learning outcomes assessment approach is to better understand how specific learning experiences offered by the institution contribute to this learning. Desired learning outcomes identified through the project include:

Knowledge

- Understands his culture within a global and comparative context (that is, the student recognizes that his culture is one of many diverse cultures and that alternate perceptions and behaviors may be based in cultural differences).
- Demonstrates knowledge of global issues, processes, trends, and systems (that is, economic and political interdependency among nations, environmental-cultural interaction, global governance bodies, and nongovernmental organizations).
- Demonstrates knowledge of other cultures (beliefs, values, perspectives, practices, and products).

Skills

- Uses knowledge, diverse cultural frames of reference, and alternate perspectives to think critically and solve problems.
- Communicates and connects with people in other language communities in a range of settings for a variety of purposes, developing skills in each of the four modalities: speaking (productive), listening (receptive), reading (receptive), and writing (productive).
- Uses foreign language skills and/or knowledge of other cultures to extend his access to information, experiences, and understanding.

Attitudes

- Appreciates the language, art, religion, philosophy, and material culture of different cultures.
- Accepts cultural differences and tolerates cultural ambiguity.
- Demonstrates an ongoing willingness to seek out international or intercultural opportunities.

How are you assessing?

- **Application of a survey/ePortfolio Approach**

The SPIF/ePortfolio approach, developed through the ACE/FIPSE project, seeks to address this goal by collecting relevant information about students and comparing it with an assessment of student work. The approach involves student completion of an ***ePortfolio*** focused on international learning and a survey called the Student and Portfolio Information Form (SPIF).

> The ePortfolio, when evaluated by a set of rubrics, offers a flexible, direct, and qualitative tool. It provides a way to feature multiple examples of student work. ePortfolios are evaluated by trained raters using a detailed rubric. It allows the assessment team to review student work and to look at either individual or aggregate student development over time.
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> The SPIF survey includes three sections.
> **Section I** asks students to list the name and source of items in the ePortfolio.
> **Section II** includes background information on the student, such as age, marital status, and citizenship and different international learning experiences.
> **Section III** can be tailored to institution-specific questions and includes questions about institution-specific courses or study abroad programs, in order to look more closely at the impact of these programs. The answers to SPIF questions can be compared, once team ratings of ePortfolios have been completed, to the portfolio ratings and analyzed to see what they say about the connections between student experiences and the learning that results from them.

When used together, the SPIF and ePortfolio tools can assist institutions in asking important questions about how student international learning experiences are contributing to their achievement of a specified set of international learning outcomes.

Challenges Faced in Implementing SPIF/ePortfolio approach

The strengths of the SPIF/ePortfolio approach—its flexibility in addressing multiple complex outcomes as well as its capacity to assemble significant student data for analysis—also presents some challenges for implementation. These challenges include:

- Getting leadership support and commitment of sufficient human and financial resources
- Appropriately familiarizing faculty and students with the approach and providing incentives for them to create and rate portfolios
- Presenting the data collected through the assessment process in usable format and making good use of this data

More Specific Issues Issues:

- **Determining Appropriate Parameters for Implementation**
- **Establishing Necessary Infrastructure and Funding**
- **Constructing a Data Collection Process**
- **Acquiring IRB Approval**

Lessons Learned in Implementing the SPIF/ePortfolio Approach

Importance of Planning for Institutional Context.
To be successful, an international learning outcomes and assessment process should be endorsed by the leadership, situated in the broader institutional context for assessment, and supported by key stakeholders at the institution. Before plunging into the implementation of the SPIF/ePortfolio approach it is advisable to evaluate your institutional context for assessment, form a team, and develop an assessment plan.

Faculty Involvement in Selecting Outcomes and Development a Plan.
Wide spread involvement of faculty in selecting international learning outcomes will help establish meaningful learning outcomes for the institution and greater buy-in from the faculty.

Keeping Things Manageable.
Consider selecting a sub-set of the outcomes and applying a portion of the rubrics. One of the project institutions found that faculty and rating teams thought the rubric was too long. In continuing the assessment process, they plan to work with the faculty to adapt the rubrics into a smaller, more streamlined package. In this way, they will gain greater buy-in with the university community and create a more effective tool.

Building in ePortfolios:
One project institution built the portfolio exercise into existing class syllabi. The ePortfolio was required of all students in the class, and only some of the students agreed to have their ePortfolio used as part of the ACE/FIPSE project. By making this exercise part of the routine coursework, both participants and non-participants in the study benefited from the educational experience of creating the portfolio, and reduced the burdens on those who agreed to participate.

Assignment Alignment:
One project institution identified a sample of students taking the same capstone course. After an initial round of assessment that did not yield a close alignment between the submitted artifacts and the desired learning outcomes, students were provided with assignment prompts in their capstone course. The next round of portfolio collection and assessment yielded more relevant artifacts and by consequence better ratings for the portfolios. This assessment team referred to this congruence as "assignment alignment." The team cautions that such assignment alignment is best achieved through an organic process whereby faculty are inspired to create assignment prompts rather than through an external mandate.

Lessons Learned on Engaging Students in Completing the SPIF
<u>Easy Access for Students</u>**:** Access must be straightforward and easy for students, or they will not take the time to complete it
<u>Ease of Usage</u>**:** Simple and clear survey instructions are important, and it helps if completion of the student survey is imbedded as part of a course or program requirement (if allowed by IRB)
<u>Survey Design</u>**:** A function that allows students to start and stop the survey makes it more flexible and feasible for students to complete

Lessons Learned – Generally About Assessment

Define your assessment purpose It is important to reach some consensus about the purpose of assessment early in the process. Implementation decisions vary considerably depending upon the purpose.

Coordinate the assessment process The assessment process will flow more smoothly if a holistic assessment package is developed that includes explicit instructions for students, and how faculty can guide students with the submission of their data.

Adapt, don't adopt. Each institution is likely to develop different international learning outcomes. Because it is important that the assessment instruments align with the outcomes, pre-existing rubrics (like those created for the ACE/FISPE project) should be adapted rather than adopted by institutions.

Less is more. Be selective. Stage Inquiries. Be selective in identifying international learning outcomes and limit the number assessed in a given assessment cycle. When adapting complex assessment tools, like the SPIF and the ePortfolio, ask the most important things you want to learn about students experiences (for the SPIF) and identify the most salient rubric criteria (for the ePortfolio).

Be specific about the connections between the outcomes and the instruments. It is important to explicitly map out links between desired international learning outcomes and the assessment instrument—how outcomes are specifically being measured by the instrument(s) you are using. It can be challenging to get buy-in from key stakeholders who may already be dubious about assessment or who may believe that international learning outcomes are not measurable.

Build in incentives or requirements for students to undergo assessment. The assessment process should be embedded in a course or required for program completion; otherwise students will not be motivated to participate. In addition, the assessment process should be a meaningful learning experience for students; they should be provided with authentic feedback on their performance.

Review IRB procedures. For those who have rigorous, comprehensive IRB committees, it's important to determine if these IRB restrictions are relevant for your assessment process and if they are, formulate your assessment plan with these restrictions in mind from the start.

Collaborate. It is important to nurture open cooperation between the administration, the assessment team, other faculty members, and external consultants (when needed). It is also important to recognize the expertise and resources that each team member brings to the table, build upon this existing knowledge base when advancing new assessment ideas, and allow time for those involved to work with these ideas..

Build, foster and sustain a learning community. Institutions need to continually nurture the assessment culture, broaden participation, and create leaders in order to successfully undertake a complex student assessment project

Web-Based Guide to Assessing International Learning: SPIF/ePortfolio Approach

The purpose of the guide is to assist institutional leaders in preparing for assessment, developing an assessment plan, implementing the SPIF/ePortfolio approach, and using the results. It offers concrete tools and practical advice to administrators and faculty on applying these tools for program improvement.

The toolkit contains descriptive details, guidelines, and documents for implementing the SPIF/ePortfolio method to assess international learning. Many of the tools on the web pages were developed and piloted as part of the ACE/FIPSE project: Lessons Learned in Assessing International Learning. They are posted in their entirety so that other institutions and teams can adapt their contents to fit their needs.

Developing International Learning Outcomes
Selecting learning outcomes is a critical first step in measuring a student's international learning. This section provides information on how to develop and select international learning outcomes and includes examples of a ranking document and the learning outcomes used in the ACE/FIPSE project.

Rubrics
Rubrics developed for assessing specified international learning outcomes are an important element in implementing ePortfolios and other qualitative methods. This section includes information on different types of rubrics and the rubric piloted in the ACE/FIPSE project.

ePortfolios
ePortfolios are an effective assessment tool when the goal is to assess multiple complex learning outcomes with one assessment tool. This section highlights links to different types of ePortfolio software, ePortfolio templates, how students can use ePortfolios, and exemplary ePortfolios.

Student Portfolio Information Form
The SPIF is a survey instrument designed to provide student information that complements the artifacts in their ePortfolios. This section presents the SPIF used by the ACE/FIPSE project, links to survey software, and suggestions for institutional adaptation.

Rating Process
The rating process is an essential step in evaluating student ePortfolios and generating data to compare with student survey results. This section includes recommendations for selecting and training a team and a Handbook for ePortfolio raters.

Sample Analysis and Strategies for Data Interpretation
After implementing and conducting an assessment approach, the final step is to analyze the results in order to use them for improvement. This page highlights questions that can be asked of the data after implementing the SPIF/ePortfolio approach, and provides an overview of how the data can be used as part of a cycle of continuous improvement.