

AAPLAC Talk
Brian Whalen, President and CEO
Forum on Education Abroad
whalenb@dickinson.edu

Using the Forum's *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* to Practice Reciprocity

The Forum on Education Abroad is the Standards Development Organization for the field of education abroad. Recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice as the association for developing and disseminating Standards of Good Practice, the Forum has developed an elaborate set of standards that include a Code of Ethics and specific standards for short-term education abroad programs.

The creation of standards presumes that they will be implemented, and that they will be used as a means to assess and improve programs. Deciding on a set of standards means also promoting their use as a means to compare how well programs meet these standards. The overall purpose, of course, is to assure quality. The Forum has followed this approach in the belief that the best way to benefit students who participate in education abroad programs is to create standards that represent the ideals to which the entire field should aspire.

Given the fact that from the beginning the Standards have been developed with the participation and input of colleagues from around the world, it is no surprise that the Standards refer specifically to the importance of practicing reciprocity in education abroad.

The principle of reciprocity have been woven into the nine Standards of Good Practice in the 4th edition of the Standards that will debut at the Forum Annual Conference in Boston, April 6-8, and I highly recommend the conference to you. In the updated edition of the Standards there is new language related to environmental and cultural responsibility of program development and management, and the Forum also has a Task Force developing guidelines for student research abroad that will include many of the principles and best practices mentioned during this meeting here.

But the principle of reciprocity is most explicit in and is a critical part of the standard on Ethics and Integrity in the Standards of Good Practice. The overall ethics standard states that "The Organization educates its employees in and adheres to its own code of ethics and/or to the ethical principles of the Forum's Code of Ethics for Education Abroad." We know from surveys of our membership that 98% of institutions use the Code of Ethics as their governing code, or to develop their own specific code of ethics.

The principle within the Code of Ethics that refers to reciprocity is the section on "Relationships with Host Societies." It states,

By its very nature education abroad engages host societies in myriad ways. In so doing, institutions and organizations should demonstrate:

- sensitivity to and respect for differences between local cultural norms and those of the home culture.

- awareness of the program's impact on the local community, a commitment to creating sustainable local relationships that are mutually beneficial, and an effort to minimize any negative effects on the host society.
- effective orientation of students, faculty and staff so that they are aware of applicable host and home country ethical and legal practices, and understand the host society, in order to avoid actions that negatively impact that society or the image of the home country.
- Education abroad organizations should seek to offer reciprocal opportunities that benefit both the sending and receiving country's educational institutions, students and broader communities. Special attention should be paid to the potential economic, political, and personal risks faced by institutions and colleagues in countries where international educational cooperation may create controversy or conflict.

While higher education globally responds to calls for greater accountability and assessment of program outcomes, the Forum's *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* provide the authoritative means for the education abroad field to respond to this call. How are these Standards enforced? In short, on a voluntary basis. Institutions and organizations that join the Forum submit with their member application a pledge to uphold the Standards of Good Practice, and the Forum has a variety of programs and services to assist members in meeting the Standards.

The Forum *Standards* are intended to be used on an ongoing basis to respond to the practical realities of developing, managing and assessing education abroad programs. These uses may be effectively integrated with existing accreditation requirements and many institutions are doing so. The *Standards* are composed of three interrelated elements intended to be used together in a comprehensive and rigorous process of assessment and improvement:

- The *statements* of the standards;
- *Queries* designed to be used for assessing how well the standards are being met;
- A *toolbox* of model approaches and best practices in meeting the standards. (I invite you to please send in examples of best practices in reciprocity)

The Forum has chosen a multi-tiered approach to the implementation of these standards that attempts to reach the broadest possible audience and include the diversity of programs that represent the field. At the same time, the Forum's membership model encourages a progression towards greater adoption and implementation of the *Standards*, culminating in the validation that is offered through successful completion of a Quality Improvement Program (QUIP) review. This validation recognizes an institution or program for conforming to the *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* and for practicing ongoing quality improvement.

The vast majority of Forum member institutions (97% according to the latest survey) have used the *Standards of Good Practice* to shape organizational/institutional policy on education abroad. The Forum strongly recommends the use of the *Standards* for this purpose, and promotes this in several different ways that are sensitive both to the diversity of Forum member

institutions and organizations, and to the stage of readiness at which an institution finds itself. For example, while some institutions and organizations are prepared to undertake the rigorous assessment of the Quality Improvement Program, others may be at a stage where a workshop training them in the *Standards* is more appropriate.

The Forum's *Standards*-related programs and services build on one another and encourage a progression toward a deeper and more thorough implementation of the *Standards*. Graphically, this can be represented this way:



Participation in the Forum's Standards of Good Practice Institutes or Standards of Good Practice Workshops are excellent ways to learn how to utilize the *Standards* as an assessment and improvement tool. Workshops and Institutes have been and will continue to be offered across the U.S. and around the world. They provide a focused and intimate setting for being trained in the *Standards* and the best practices that conform to the *Standards*. Workshops can also be customized to meet the specific needs of an institution or organization and Forum members are encouraged to contact the Forum if they are interested in hosting a workshop on their campus or in their offices.

A more rigorous and formal level of application of the *Standards* comes from participation in the Forum's Guided Standards Assessments. These Assessments are offered on a range of education abroad topics that relate to specific areas of the Standards. Participants proceed through a guided self-assessment following a protocol developed by the Forum and involving several other institutions and organizations as part of the cohort. Webinars bring the cohort together to address challenges, share best practices, and discuss strategies for meeting the *Standards*. The outcome is feedback and recommendations from the Forum regarding how well

an institution or organization is meeting the *Standards*, which practices of theirs are best practices, and recommendations for improvement.

The highest level of education abroad assessment and quality assurance is offered by the Forum's Quality Improvement Program (QUIP). Like the Guided Standards Assessments, QUIP is based on an objective and authoritative set of standards, with these additional enhancements and benefits:

- The process is managed objectively by the Forum and according to a well-established, tested protocol;
- It involves trained, objective peer reviewers who analyze all materials and conduct site visits;
- QUIP has a series of built-in checks and balances that allows for the institution under review to respond officially to the Peer Reviewers' Report;
- The final decision about whether or not an institution under review is in substantial conformity with the *Standards* rests with the Forum Review Panel, an independent body of senior colleagues who review all materials generated by the review in order to make a decision;
- A recognition by the Forum for meeting the Standards of Good Practice that may be communicated to an institution's constituents.

No matter how an institution or organization utilizes the Standards to assess and improve its programs, the goal should be to benefit students. Only by informing ourselves of the accepted standards of the field, including those related to reciprocity, and by dedicating ourselves to ongoing assessment and improvement, can we be assured that our programs are the very best that they can be.

For more information, visit the Forum web site at www.forumea.org