

WORKING TOGETHER

Education Abroad and Virtual Exchange in 2023 and Beyond

ABRIDGED VERSION

Author: Gudrun Nyunt, Ph.D



Stevens
Initiative

© 2023 The Forum on Education Abroad and the Stevens Initiative/the Aspen Institute.

Report prepared by Dr. Gudrun Nyunt, Ph.D., based on research conducted by Dr. Nyunt as commissioned by the Aspen Institute and under the supervision of Dr. Amelia Dietrich (The Forum on Education Abroad) and Kyle Kastler (The Stevens Initiative).

Cover art, design, and infographics prepared by Dyego Senesi. www.dyego.com

DOI: 10.36366/R.WTEAVE2023B.a (Abridged version)

DOI: 10.36366/R.WTEAVE2023B.c (Comprehensive report)

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Key Findings	4
About The Forum on Education Abroad	5
About the Stevens Initiative	5
Why We've Partnered on This Project	5
Introduction	6
About the Research Project	7
Findings: The Current State of International Education Programming	8
Opportunities & Considerations	9
Education Abroad	11
Virtual Exchange	15
Education Abroad and Virtual Exchange	19
Conclusion	24
References	25

Executive Summary

This multi-site case study research project, supported by The Forum on Education and the Stevens Initiative, explored the state of international education programming after the COVID-19 pandemic, with a specific focus on education abroad and virtual exchange. Data was collected in summer 2023 for 11 cases representing the following categories: (a) four-year, large public higher education institutions, (b) small and/or private four-year higher education institutions, (c) community colleges or two-year institutions, (d) K-12 education institutions or systems, (e) governmental organizations, and (f) education abroad providers. Data collection included interviews with 16 staff members at the different institutions and organizations as well as analysis of institutional/organizational websites. The aim of the study was to gain insights into current international education programming at the institution or organization as well as professionals' thoughts about the future of international education programming.

Key Findings

- While institutions are returning to education abroad programming, this return has been slow and not all institutions/organizations have been able to return to pre-pandemic. At the same time, the pandemic introduced many participants to virtual exchange and the hope is to continue and expand these offerings.
- The pandemic led to human resource shortages, which negatively impacted and continues to impact international education programming (education abroad and virtual exchange).
- Participants highlighted the value of offering both virtual exchange and mobility programming to foster global education but noted challenges in communicating the value of virtual exchange to constituents.
- Participants noted that while virtual exchange can increase access and minimize power differences, access concerns and ethical dilemmas exist within these types of programs as well.

This report highlights opportunities and considerations for international education scholars and practitioners, as they re-image, revamp, or expand international education programming to scaffold global learning more intentionally at their institutions.

About The Forum on Education Abroad



The Forum 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 provides training and resources to education abroad professionals and its *Standards of Good Practice* are recognized as the definitive means by which the quality of education abroad programs may be judged. The Forum's mission is to cultivate educators who champion high quality education abroad experiences that ignite curiosity, impact lives, and contribute to a better world. The Forum's institutional members include U.S. colleges and universities, overseas institutions, consortia, agencies, organizations, and foundations who are committed to improving education abroad. Learn more: <https://www.forumea.org>.

About the Stevens Initiative



The Stevens Initiative is an international leader in virtual exchange, which brings young people from diverse places together to collaborate and connect through everyday technology. Created in 2015, the Initiative invests in virtual exchange programs; shares research, resources, and promising practices to improve impact; and advocates for broader adoption. Learn more: <https://www.stevensinitiative.org/>.

The Stevens Initiative is a program of the Aspen Institute and is supported by the Bezos Family Foundation and the governments of Morocco and the United Arab Emirates. The J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative is a U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs program administered by the Aspen Institute.

Why We've Partnered on This Project

Since 2020, the Stevens Initiative and The Forum on Education Abroad have been engaged in a collaborative partnership to support their common stakeholders, exchange expertise, and identify possibilities and innovations that will move the field of international education forward. Out of this collaboration, questions have arisen about how education abroad and virtual exchange – also referred to as virtual and in-person mobility – intersect in practice. These questions have included how these two different approaches might work together to develop global competencies in students, how educators and administrators perceive the value of these experiences and the relationship between them, and how we can advance those discourses to improve participation rates and learning outcomes for all types of mobilities in the future. This joint report represents one collective effort to move that conversation forward.

Introduction

Education abroad is often seen as the most effective way to foster students' global learning (Knight & de Wit, 2018; Stearns, 2009). But while participation in education abroad consistently increased prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Institute of International Education, 2022), scholars have raised concerns about access to education abroad (Goldstein & Lopez, 2021; Salisbury et al., 2010; 2011), questioned the effectiveness of education abroad in achieving its intended outcomes (e.g., Niehaus & Nyunt, 2023; Nyunt, Niehaus, & Benavides, 2022; Vande Berg et al., 2012), and highlighted inequities that are embedded in current forms of education abroad (George Mwangi & Yao, 2021).

While education abroad continues to be central to many institution's internationalization strategies (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2023), international education programming has for decades included other initiatives such as the internationalization of the curriculum (Stearns, 2009) and virtual exchanges (O'Dowd & Dooley, 2020). As the COVID-19 pandemic led to a disruption in global travel, scholars argued that international education practitioner should use this disruption to rethink international education programming, creating more comprehensive approaches to internationalization and addressing the inequalities existing within current models (e.g., Beelen & Doscher, 2022; Bruhn-Zass, 2022; Dietrich, 2020; Leask, 2020; Quan et al., 2023). Virtual exchange offerings at higher education institutions increased during the pandemic (Stevens Initiative, 2020; 2021; 2022b) but it remains to be seen if the level of interest in virtual exchange will be sustained beyond the pandemic and if virtual exchange becomes an integral aspect of institutional internationalization efforts.

The purpose of this multi-case study research project was to explore the current state of international education programming, with a specific focus on education abroad and virtual exchanges, at different types of institutions and organizations in the United States. This report aims to provide practitioners and scholars insights into current operations at the institutions and organizations and their plans for the future. The report highlights opportunities and considerations as readers reflect on their own international education offerings.

About the Research Project

This qualitative research project used a multi-case study approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). A case study is an in-depth exploration of a clearly bound case (Yin, 2014). Each institution or organization served as a case or unit of analysis. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do international education professionals perceive the landscape of international education programming to be different, if at all, after the pandemic?
2. How are international education professionals approaching programming after the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What modalities of programming (e.g., virtual, mobility, blended) do international education professionals focus on in their current approaches to programming and why?
4. How do international education professionals envision the future of international education programming?

The cases analyzed for this study were:

- 3 four-year, large public higher education institutions
- 1 small, private four-year higher education institutions
- 3 community colleges or two-year institutions
- 2 K-12 education institutions or systems
- 1 governmental organization
- 1 education abroad provider

One or multiple participants for each case were interviewed, a total of 17 interviews. Interview participant demographics are noted in the table. Participants' years of experience in international education programming ranged from 4 to 30, with an average of over 15 years of experience. A more detailed table can be found in the [appendix](#).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Woman	14	82
Man	2	12
Prefer Not to Answer	1	6
Race/Ethnicity		
Asian	3	18
White/Caucasian	11	64
Prefer Not to Answer	3	18

Findings: The Current State of International Education Programming

Four themes emerged from interviews with 17 professionals working in international education programming at 11 different institutions or organizations and review of institutional and organizational websites. The first theme highlights an overview of the landscape of international education programming, while the other three themes dive into aspects of or challenges related to international education programming that emerged from the data. Brief summaries of each theme are provided below. A longer description of each theme with examples from various cases that support the theme is available in the full-length version of this report.

Changes in International Education Programming During and Post Pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a pause or at minimum a significant reduction in the quantity of education abroad offerings. At the same time, the pandemic led to an increase in virtual offerings, with many institutions and organizations launching their first virtual exchanges during the pandemic or expanding existing offerings. As pandemic-related travel restrictions were lifted, institutions slowly returned to in-person education abroad offerings with some, though not all, participants reaching pre-pandemic participation levels and number of offerings by summer 2023. Despite the return to in-person travel, most participants emphasized the hope to continue or even further expand virtual exchange at their institution or organization.

The Impact of Human Resource Shortages on International Education

Programming: The COVID-19 pandemic and institutional responses to the pandemic led to a reduction in human resources for international education programming. Many institutions experienced significant staff turn-over due to a mix of layoffs and voluntary departures due to the uncertainty of the future of the field, which negatively impacted institution's ability to offer international education programming post pandemic. In addition, faculty and teacher burnout negatively impact institution's ability to continue or expand their international education programming post-pandemic.

Developing a Comprehensive International Education Programming Portfolio:

Participants noted the importance of developing a comprehensive international education programming portfolio that includes both education abroad and virtual exchange. Participants emphasized the value of scaffolded or blended programs, though not all were able to organize these types of programs due to limited resources or challenges with organizational structures. Participants, however, also noted that many stakeholders were more familiar with education abroad as a strategy for fostering global education than virtual exchange and that they encountered challenges in articulating the value of virtual exchange to some of their constituencies.

The Opportunities and Limitations of Increasing Access and Minimizing Power Differences Through Virtual Programming:

Participants highlighted how virtual exchange can advance equity by increasing access to international education programming and minimizing power differences between individuals from different countries. Despite these opportunities to advance equity, several participants also noted inequities and ethical dilemmas that arise in virtual exchange.

Opportunities & Considerations

This section is based on innovative practices already in existence at participating institutions and organizations as well as practices interview participants are hoping to implement and questions interview participants are currently wrestling with.

The section is broken into the following parts highlighting opportunities and considerations related to

- (a) education abroad,
- (b) virtual exchange, and
- (c) education abroad and virtual exchange.

5 STRATEGIES INTERNATIONAL EDUCATORS CAN USE TO ENGAGE MORE STUDENTS IN EA FAST



Minimize jargon on your website. We know what “direct-enroll” means. Our students don’t.



Work with peer mentors who share identities with the underrecruited and underserved populations you’re trying to reach.



Parents & Families info sessions can engage these key stakeholders as supporters, not detractors.



Be super transparent and proactive when communicating the financial obligations and opportunities for support to fund EA participation.



Address mental health and wellbeing proactively by engaging students in self-assessment, preparing faculty program leaders, and engaging cohorts in more team building before their departure date.



Stevens
Initiative

Education Abroad



Recruitment of Underrepresented Students

While participation of underrepresented students has increased in the past decades, Black and Latinx students continue to be underrepresented among the students who participate in education abroad (Institute of International Education, 2022; Nyunt, Veron, & Sledge, 2022). Elia from Midwest Religiously Affiliated Liberal Arts Institution highlighted innovative practices her institution used to increase the participation of underrepresented students.

- *Peer Mentors*: The education abroad office recruited peer mentors who identify as Latinx to support Latinx students interested in education abroad.
- *Scholarship Fund*: The institution created a new scholarship fund to financially support Latinx students.
- *Info Session for Latinx Students and Parents*: The education abroad office hosted an information session for Latinx students and parents. Information about education abroad was shared in Spanish and past students and parents shared their experiences with education abroad at the session.
- *Heritage-Seeking Programs for Latinx Students*: The institution increased its offering of heritage-seeking programs for Latinx students. During information sessions, Latinx alumni of those programs shared what they got out of going on a heritage-seeking program.
- *On-Going Assessment of Efforts*: When the education abroad office initially developed these new approaches to recruiting Latinx students to education abroad, staff got feedback from Latinx students and parents. As the office continues with these efforts, they plan to hold regular focus groups with Latinx students to see if their efforts continue to meet students' needs or how they may need to be tweaked or revised.



Proactively Addressing Students' Financial Needs

Finances can be a barrier to students' ability to participate in education abroad (Whatley, 2017). Proactively addressing students' financial needs can help increase the number of students who can participate in education abroad, particularly for students from minoritized or lower socio-economic backgrounds. Margaret from Atlantic Large Public shared how her office tries to address students' financial needs:

- *Individual Financial Guidance*: The education abroad office hired a part-time financial aid staff member. This staff member meets with every student who

receives some financial aid and helps them figure out their options for participating in education abroad.

- *Transparent Financial Information:* The education abroad office also includes financial information about education abroad in every aspect of the application process to increase students' financial literacy and address myths about the cost of education abroad.



Minimization of Jargon on Websites and in Advising Sessions

Education abroad, as many other fields, uses a lot of jargon that may be difficult for students to understand. One way to increase access to education abroad and ensure that students choose education abroad programs that align with their interests is to reduce the use of jargon on websites and in advising sessions. Below is an example of how to reduce the use of jargon:

- Rather than describing programs as “direct-enroll” or “faculty-led” programs, staff at Atlantic Large Public try to describe how these types of programs differ from the perspective of students. Descriptions focus on what students' experiences in the program will be like, who they will spend time with, where they will live, and so on.



Proactively Addressing Mental Health Issues Via Self-Assessment

Mental health issues among students have been on the rise prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (American College Health Association, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic led to further negative impacts on student mental health (Charles et al., 2021; The Healthy Minds Network & American College Health Association, 2020; Nyunt, McMillen, et al., 2022). Proactively addressing student mental health prior to sending them abroad is important in minimizing issues that arise abroad. Elia from Midwest Religiously Affiliated Liberal Arts Institution shared her office's approach:

- *Student Self-Assessment:* Rather than asking students to disclose medications and provide information from their doctor or counselor, students are asked to self-assess their mental health and other challenges they may face abroad. This self-assessment is used to encourage students to make informed decisions on whether they should go abroad or the supports they need to put in place to be successful when going abroad.
- *Faculty Training:* Health and wellness staff provide information to faculty leaders on what to look for regarding students' mental health. Counselors are available to do assessments remotely or meet with faculty and/or students remotely during education abroad programs.

- *More Team Building Prior to Going Abroad:* Staff now focus more on team building during education abroad orientations to help students feel part of a group before going abroad and provide them with a peer support network.

Utilization of Virtual Modalities for Trainings, Information Sessions, and Advising

The pandemic increased staff, faculty, and students' comfort level with using virtual modalities. Several participants shared that their offices were using virtual platforms to facilitate training sessions for faculty, information and advising sessions for students, and other meetings related to education abroad. Below are examples of activities that staff conducted using virtual modalities:

- *Education Abroad 101 Sessions:* Atlantic Large Public university encourages students to first attend an Education Abroad 101 session to gain a better understanding of education abroad and the different types of programs. These sessions are offered virtually and in person. By learning about the basics of education abroad first, students are better prepared for their first individual advising meeting and these advising meetings can go into more depth.
- *Faculty Training Sessions:* Several participants noted that they utilize virtual modalities for faculty training sessions. At some institutions, these sessions are offered as asynchronous online sessions that faculty can complete on their own time; at other institutions, these trainings are held synchronously online.

Questions to Continue Wrestling With in Education Abroad

As institutions return to offering education abroad programs, there was hope that international education programming would be re-imaged to be more equitable. In reality, however, participants shared that while there were some innovations, many institutions have returned to old models for education abroad. Education abroad professionals and scholars should continue wrestling with the following questions:

- *Student Needs:* Participants noted that student needs have changed since the pandemic. Margaret from Atlantic Large Public noted that there was a need to "re-learn" what students are looking for post-pandemic. Having had less contact with students during the pandemic may have led to some disconnect. Margaret explained, "We are seeing different behaviors technologically and advising, I still struggle with what they're going to like. There are certain things that are popping up that we've never seen before." Angela from [Transformative Study Abroad Provider](#) similarly noted that students' behaviors had changed, and her organization was trying to figure out how to address these changes. Angela, in particular, noted the following behaviors she had heard staff members struggle with: "withdrawal, not wanting to engage in activities as much as perhaps prior. . . overstimulation is happening quite quickly. Fear and anxiety." She noted that these behaviors were particularly prominent among middle and high school students.

4 INNOVATIONS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATORS CAN USE TO ENGAGE MORE STUDENTS IN VIRTUAL EXCHANGE FAST



Incorporate virtual exchange into introductory or general education courses.



Make it easy for students to identify if a course includes virtual exchange in course management systems and course catalogs.



Develop a clear process for faculty to propose new virtual exchange courses. Consider template syllabi, consultation hours, a faculty handbook.



Connect the proposal process to support. Even a small seed grant can help overcome the hurdles that get in the way of virtual exchange development.



Stevens
Initiative

Virtual Exchange



Institutionalizing virtual exchange and incorporating it into large introductory or general education courses

As institutions strive to scale up virtual exchange, many participants shared a need to develop procedures or processes for creating virtual exchanges. Participants emphasized the importance of focusing on course-level implementations of virtual exchange, so courses do not depend on one faculty member's passion and knowledge but can be taught by different faculty and exist beyond one faculty member's involvement in a program. In addition, participants noted that virtual exchanges were primarily being offered in higher-level, specialized courses but to maximize the impact of virtual exchange, these courses should be incorporated into large introductory or general education courses that all students are required to take.

The process of how go about institutionalizing virtual exchange may differ by institution but the following bullet points highlight different approaches and considerations for scaling up virtual exchange:

- *Intentional Incorporation into Courses Required for Students:* Introductory courses to a specific major or general education courses may be good courses to incorporate virtual exchanges. That way, more students will be required to take the course and gain access to virtual exchange. In addition, these courses often focus on relationship building and teamwork in addition to course content. Parvati from Atlantic Large Public and Alexis from Midwest Large Public both talked about trying to identify larger, introductory courses for virtual exchanges and Nick from Southern Large Public talked about the value of having virtual exchange courses count toward general education requirements. Nichole from Large Metropolitan Public School District talked about trying to make global education (including virtual exchange) “the common practice, not like a niche thing.” Her office is currently working on ways to make that happen such as incorporating global learning outcomes into standard education goals and requirements.
- *Easy Identification of Courses:* Several participants noted working on ways to identify virtual exchange in their course management system, so students could search for these types of courses or would be provided with an explanation of what virtual exchange is before signing up for such a course.
- *Clear Process for Proposing New Courses:* Several participants discussed creating systems or processes for new faculty to propose virtual exchanges. Nick from Southern Large Public created a syllabus template that was approved through the institution's curriculum process. Debbie from Midwest Community College developed a process for faculty to apply for either virtual exchange or education abroad courses. Debbie then meets with faculty one-on-one to develop

the program. Debbie also has a handbook she shares with faculty that lists various considerations for developing a virtual exchange.

- *Funding for Courses:* Juan from Midwest Large Public is working toward a centralized funding source, which would provide more equitable access to funding for faculty from different colleges or schools. Having explicit funding guidelines and centralized sources of funds can encourage faculty from various departments develop virtual exchanges.



Utilizing Virtual Exchange to Introduce Younger Students to International Education

Participants from the K-12 sector talked about the value of virtual exchange for introducing younger students to international education. While education abroad has started to be available to high school students, travel can get very complicated with younger students (i.e., middle school or even elementary school).

- *Virtual Exchange for Middle School Students:* Large Metropolitan School District has been offering a virtual exchange program that pairs a middle school classroom with a classroom in another country. This experience gives students in middle school an introduction to cross-cultural collaborations.



One Size Does Not Fit All

Participants highlighted the importance of developing your own virtual exchange programs that fit your students' needs and align with institutional missions and goals. Participants shared a variety of approaches that work well for their unique student needs:

- *Incorporation of Community-Based Learning:* Parvati from Atlantic Large Public noted how her institution is striving to incorporate more community-based learning into their virtual exchanges, in what she called a “modified COIL course”.
- *Different Models for U.S. Institutions and International Partners:* Nick from Southern Large Public shared how the structure and model may differ between the U.S. institution and the international partner. For his program, all activities in the United States were incorporated into a course, while in Morocco, the virtual exchange was set up as extracurricular activities. Despite the lack of course credit students from Morocco received, his colleagues in Morocco had more interested students than they could accommodate.
- *Virtual Engagement Laboratory for Pre-Service Teachers:* Melissa from Midwest Large Public shared that the college of education offers a global laboratory. Middle school students from 15-20 different countries join a virtual club. Pre-service teachers at Midwest Large Public facilitate sessions for the middle school's students focused on sustainability goals. International students from

Midwest Large Public also support this initiative by collaborating with the pre-service teachers. The initiative provides a laboratory for pre-service teachers to hone their skills in teaching online, facilitating sessions with students from different cultural backgrounds, and practicing how to teach collaboration across cultures.

- *Career-Focused Programs for Community College Students:* Debbie from Midwest Community College noted that her students were very focused on preparing for their careers; thus, virtual exchange as well as education abroad initiatives need to focus on career-related skills. Debbie explained that virtual exchange could be used to help students realize why intercultural skills are important in their future career as they may end up communicating with international suppliers or be part of an international company with offices in different countries.
- *Virtual Exchange as an Introduction to International Education for Elementary and Middle School Students:* For Nichole at Metropolitan School District, virtual exchange was primarily about introducing younger students (e.g., elementary or middle school) to global learning, so they would get excited for mobility programs and deeper global learning offered in high school.



Questions to Continue Wrestling With in Virtual Exchange

As institutions develop virtual exchanges or scale up existing program offerings, there is a need to move from a focus on technology and logistics to the curriculum of these courses and ethical questions that this type of international education programming brings up. As most of the participants were relatively new to virtual exchange, many mentioned that they had not yet been able to do so. Below are some questions that professionals and scholars should continue wrestling with:

- *Power Differences:* Participants raised questions about the power differences between U.S. participants and international partners that are embedded in the structure of a specific virtual exchange program. These differences may exist because a U.S. institution decides to create a virtual exchange and looks for a partner, or because the course is offered in English or uses the learning management system of the U.S. institution. Participants raised the need to identify, reflect on, and strive to minimize these power differences.
- *Access:* While virtual exchange can increase access, participants noted that funding and resources of different schools within one institution or between different institution types may impact who has access to virtual exchange. Students may also be limited in their ability to participate due to a lack of access to the necessary technology or because the time frame conflicts with other commitments they have. Thus, professionals need to continue asking questions about who can access these opportunities and develop strategies to increase access.

EDUCATION ABROAD + VIRTUAL EXCHANGE =



Make global learning a priority.

Incorporate international education and global competencies into standard learning outcomes, mission statements, and graduation requirements.

Start them young! Virtual exchange participation during K-12 schooling can be an efficient strategy for exposing students to the world around them and making them curious to explore it without fear as they grow up.



Relationships are everything. Blended programming or virtual exchange that precedes education abroad programming in the partner's community lengthens the timeline and multiplies the opportunities for students and faculty to have time to build relationships, invest in the process, and learn from each other.

Challenge students to apply their global learning in different contexts. Working across cultures abroad or in a virtual space can build competencies for working across cultures within one's local community, too.



Stevens
Initiative

Education Abroad and Virtual Exchange

Scaffolded and Blended Programs

Participants highlighted the value of creating scaffolded and blended programs. These types of programs allow for more in-depth and sustained engagement across cultures. Being able to build relationships prior to meeting in person can minimize the awkwardness of these initial in-person encounters and make students feel more comfortable about traveling abroad. Debbie from Midwest Community College stressed how scaffolded or blended programs were particularly useful for language students at her institutions “who are fairly nervous about having to speak in another language.” Having been able to interact with students from another country in the foreign language prior to traveling abroad “has been sort of a stepping stone for many of our students,” Debbie explained. In addition, scaffolded or blended programs allow for moving to in-depth conversations and learning faster as the early relationship building already occurred during virtual meetings.

- *Virtual before Travel:* Participants who organized these types of programs talked about typically having the virtual component first, as it allows for initial connections and relationship building. Once students have developed these relationships, the travel component occurs.
- *Important Questions to Consider:* When creating scaffolded or blended programs, it’s important to consider inequalities and power differences that these programs may reinforce. For example, will only one group of students travel? If so, how may that impact the dynamics between the two groups? For language programs, what language is spoken during which parts of the program? How might choices around primary language impact power differences between participating student groups?

Faculty/Teacher Professional Development

As institutions strive to expand or scale up virtual exchange or continue to offer education abroad programs, participants stressed a need to focus on faculty or teacher professional development. For example, Samantha from Midwest Governmental Organization, stated, “Our efforts to meet this goal [international education for all students] are going to be comprised of teachers themselves and school leaders aren’t invested in supporting that.” Providing faculty or teacher professional development can emphasize the value of international education programming, re-energize faculty and teachers, who may feel burnt out, and provide faculty and teachers with the tools needed to create international education programs. Participants shared different innovative practices for faculty/teacher professional development.

- *Faculty Language Training:* Using grant funding, Midwest Religiously Affiliated Liberal Arts College offers language training for faculty interested in facilitating an education abroad program. Faculty can participate in an immersive summer language study in the host country. The institution also has several global scholars teaching language courses on campus.
- *Course Release and Summer Workshops:* At Midwest Religiously Affiliated Liberal Arts College, faculty receive a course release the semester before they lead an education abroad program. This course release allows them to put time toward developing the course. In addition, the education abroad office hosted summer workshops for putting together the curriculum for education abroad courses.
- *Teacher Academy:* Samantha from Midwest Governmental Organization shared that her organization hosted a teacher academy that prepared teachers for facilitating virtual exchanges. The academy itself was a virtual exchange, as 20 nations were represented among participants. Teachers, thus, not only learned about virtual exchange but experienced participating in a virtual exchange themselves.
- *Balance of Virtual and In-Person for Faculty/Teacher Training:* Nichole from Large Metropolitan Public School District emphasized the importance of finding a good balance between virtual and in-person opportunities to maximize learning and engagement but minimize the workload and commuting time for teachers. Nichole said, "Working with the teachers, I think there's a lot of value in being able to be in person but it's a lot harder to get teachers to come in person right now because there's so much that they're expected to do." This year, the teacher professional development program, which has been virtual since the onset of the pandemic, will have two in-person days in addition to monthly virtual meetings to allow for both in-person relationship building and the convenience of virtual meetings.

WHAT FACULTY WANT:

4 Supports to Make Engaging in Education Abroad & Virtual Exchange Work for Overworked Faculty



Focus on learning. Logistics and technology can take up a lot of time. Don't let them overpower the critical thinking and creativity that goes into designing a meaningful global learning experience. International education administrators and faculty deliver the best results for students when they work together as thought partners and draw on their respective strengths to bring a program to life.

Offer professional development. Being a good teacher means being a lifelong learner, too. Support professional development around VE and EA to carve out time for faculty to focus on these efforts and build their skill sets and community around them.



Give examples. Syllabi templates and model course set-ups in a learning management system can help faculty imagine how a program comes together and reduce their administrative burden so they can focus on student learning.

Money matters. Start-up or course development funds help offset the additional labor that comes with designing a new course or program. Course releases can also be used as an alternative if the cash isn't available.



Stevens
Initiative

Connect International Education to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts

Several participants discussed how connecting international education to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives could be beneficial for both efforts. The two initiatives have similar intended outcomes, and both need to be incorporated in what all faculty and staff at an organization do to be successful. Participants shared different approaches to creating this connection:

- *Reporting Structures:* At many institutions, international education and DEI offices are however located within different divisions, which limits collaboration between the two offices. Debbie from Midwest Community College talked about how she advocated for a “dotted reporting line” to the vice president of DEI to improve her ability to collaborate with DEI at her institution.
- *Programming Connections:* Samantha from Midwest Governmental Organization shared that as part of the Global Scholars program students have to apply what they learned through global education programs to the local context via 20 hours of local community service that aligns with a global learning theme. Creating programs that challenge students to make the connection between global learning and DEI efforts at home can help highlight the similarity in skills and competencies required for working across cultures within one’s home country or abroad.

Incorporation of International Education into Standards or Requirements

Several participants discussed efforts to include international education into standards or requirements. For example, Nichole from Large Metropolitan School District shared how she was trying to find ways to incorporate global education into the structure of K-12 education. Samantha from Midwest Governmental Organization talked about how she has been working on incorporating international education learning outcomes into education standards in her state. At the university level, Nick from Southern Large Public talked about incorporating international education into general education requirements. Below are some possibilities for incorporating international education into standards or requirements:

- *Education Standards:* Incorporate international education learning outcomes into standards in the K-12 settings.
- *Mission Statements:* Incorporate international education in institutional mission statements.
- *General Education at Higher Education Institutions:* Get virtual exchange or education abroad courses approved as general education requirements or require students to participate in an international education program as part of their general education requirements.

Questions to Continue Wrestling With for Both Education Abroad and Virtual Exchange

Participants noted several questions they continue to wrestle that apply to both, education abroad and virtual exchange:

- *Faculty and Teacher Burnout:* Participants discussed how faculty and teacher burnout has made it more difficult to find individuals willing to organize international education programming. Angela from Transformative Study Abroad Provider also noted how she has noticed changes in faculty behavior, which may be due to burnout. She explained that faculty seem to be putting more pressure on program designers and local facilitators and seem to be more anxious about facilitating their programs and engaging with locals. International education staff at their institution need to continue working with administrators to find ways to incentivize or reward faculty for organizing international education programming, while continuing to create resources and support systems that minimize faculty workload.
- *Assessment:* Assessing the learning that occurs in education abroad and virtual exchange continues to be a challenge. While participants noted that various different tools exist, none of the participants seemed to find any of the tools particularly useful. Most tools rely on students rating their intercultural skills or competencies. Some participants noted that they were starting to look at qualitative data more, for example assignments or projects students completed as part of their international education programs or after completion of these programs. Analyzing this data, however, is much more time intensive. Some participants also questioned the value of assessment and whether there would ever be an effective way to assess students' learning in these experiences. International education professionals and scholars need to continue wrestling with how the learning in international education can best be assessed or what other ways professionals can use to showcase the value of international education programming.
- *Impact of Virtual Engagement on Interest in Study Abroad:* Several participants noted that virtual may increase interest in education abroad, though this was typically based on anecdotal evidence. Debbie from Midwest Community College, for example, noted that virtual exchange can help ease anxieties of language students, as they can practice speaking in a foreign language in their virtual exchange courses which then better prepares them to go abroad. Nick from Southern Large Public similarly noted that students may be more prepared to go abroad after engaging in virtual exchange but also pointed out that some students may not want to go abroad, as they become more aware of the challenges of engaging across cultures. Melissa from Midwest Large Public shared that one student mentioned to her that she no longer needs to participate in education abroad, since she has had the opportunity to engage in a virtual engagement opportunity. At the same time, Melissa noticed that several students

who participated in virtual opportunities also chose to participate in education abroad and some asked to engage in virtual opportunities while abroad. More research is needed to understand how virtual engagement impacts interest in education abroad and vice versa.

Conclusion

The return to international education programming after the height of the COVID-19 pandemic has been slow, particularly for less resourced institutions whose students, faculty, and staff were more impacted by the pandemic. High staff turnover in the international education field, faculty or teacher burnout, and limited budget continue to create barriers for rebuilding or expanding international education programming. At the same time, the pandemic provided an opportunity to explore virtual programming for many participants and led participants to see the value in continuing virtual exchanges beyond the pandemic. Participants highlighted how virtual exchanges can increase access to international education for students and faculty. Institutions are creating their own versions of virtual exchanges that address their students' unique needs and interests. Many are also starting to experiment with scaffolded or blended programs. As virtual exchange offerings increase, international education professionals will need to spend more time focused on the pedagogy of virtual programming, assessing the learning that occurs within these programs, and examine inequalities that may exist within these programs and wrestle with ethical questions related to virtual programming.

References

- American College Health Association (2020). *American College Health Association – National College Health Assessment: Publications and reports*. Author. https://www.acha.org/NCHA/ACHA-NCHA_Data/Publications_and_Reports/NCHA/Data/Reports/ACHA-NCHAIII.aspx
- Baer, J., & Martel, M. (2023). Spring 2023 snapshot on international educational exchange. Institute of International Education. <https://www.iie.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IIE-Spring-2023-Snapshot-on-International-Educational-Exchange.pdf>
- Beelen, J., & Doscher, S. (2022). Situating COIL virtual exchange within concepts of internationalization. In B. D. Ruben (Ed.), *Implementing sustainable change in higher education* (pp. 32-54). Routledge.
- Bruhn-Zass, E. (2022). Virtual internationalization to support comprehensive internationalization in higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 26(2), 240-258.
- Charles, N. E., Strong, S. J., Burns, L. C., Bullerjahn, M. R., & Serafine, K. M. (2021). Increased mood disorder symptoms, perceived stress, and alcohol use among college students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychiatry Research*, 296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2021.113706>
- Chronicle Staff (2020, July 29). Here's our list of college's reopening plans. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Here-s-a-List-of-Colleges-/248626>
- COIL Connect (n.d.) COIL Connect for virtual exchange. <https://coilconnect.org/>
- Crawford, J., Butler-Henderson, K., Rudolph, J., Malkawi, B., Glowatz, M., et al. (2020). COVID-19: 20 countries' higher education intra-period digital pedagogy responses. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, 3(1), 1-20. doi: 10.37074/jalt.2020.3.1.7
- Dietrich, A. J. (2020). Charting a Path Forward for Education Abroad Research. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 32(2), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v32i2.465>
- Engle, L., & Engle, J. (2003). Study abroad levels: Toward a classification of program types. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 9(1), 1-20.
- George Mwangi, C. A., & Yao, C. W. (2021). U.S. higher education internationalization through an equity-driven lens: An analysis of concepts, history, and research. In L. W. Perna (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, 36 (pp. 549–609). Springer.
- Goldstein, S. B., & Lopez, H. N. (2021). An intersectional investigation of study abroad intent among Latino/a and White first-generation college students. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 33(2), 1-16.
- Honey, M., Young, K., & Cowls, H. (2019) Virtual student collaboration: Connecting student health professionals. *Studies in Health Technology and Informatics*, 264, 1935-1936. <https://doi.org/10.3233/shti190721>
- Institute of International Education (2022). *Open Doors: 2020*. Author. Retrieved from <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors>
- Knight, J., & de Wit, H. (2018). Preface: Internationalization of higher education: Where have we come from and where are we going? In D. Proctor & L. E. Rumbley (Eds.), *The future agenda for internationalization in higher education: Next generation insights into research, policy, and practice* (pp. xix–xxiv). Routledge.
- Laux, D., Luse, A., & Mennecke, B. E. (2016). Collaboration, connectedness, and community: An examination of the factors influencing student persistence in virtual communities. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 57, 452-464. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.046>
- Leask, B. (2020). Embracing the possibilities of disruption. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39. Advanced online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1824211>
- Lee, J. & Song, J. (2019) Developing intercultural competence through study abroad, telecollaboration, and on-campus language study. *Language, Learning & Technology*, 23(3), 178-198. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/44702>

- Levine-West, G., Lam, Y., & Schaeffer, G. (2023). Study abroad in a (post-) pandemic world: Our new normal and some reasons for optimism. *L2 Journal*, 15(2), 29-53.
- Liu, Y., & Shirley, T. (2021). Without crossing a border: Exploring the impact of shifting study abroad online on students' learning and intercultural competence development during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Online Learning Journal*, 2021, 182-194. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v25i1.2471>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Niehaus, E. & Nyunt, G. (2023). Uncovering the potential learning in short-term study abroad. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 60(3), 417-432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2021.1997758>
- Nyunt, G., McMillen, J., Oplt, K., & Beckham, V. (2022). Flourishing (or lack thereof) during COVID-19: College students' social psychological well-being during the Fall 2020 semester. *Journal of American College Health*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2021.2024548>
- Nyunt, G., Niehaus, E., & Benavides, M. (2022). A catalyst for learning or reinforcement of inequities: Using a critical hope lens to understand the potential and limitations of short-term study abroad in fostering students' ability to effectively interact across differences. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000421>
- Nyunt, G., Veron, R., & Sledge, K. (2022c). Shaped by intersecting identities: BIPOC women's stories of their study abroad experiences. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000449>
- O'Dowd, R., & Dooly, M. (2020). Intercultural communicative competence development through telecollaboration and virtual exchange. In R. O'Dowd (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language and intercultural communication* (2nd ed., pp. 361-375). Routledge
- Pedersen, E., Fitzke, R., Bouskill, K., & Sedano, A. (2021). A qualitative look at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on American college students studying abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 33(3), 70-100.
- Quan, T., Diao, W., & Trentman, E. (2023). Returning to Normal?: Reimagining Study Abroad and Language Learning for a Sustainable and Equitable Future. *L2 Journal*, 15(2), 145-159.
- Salisbury, M. H., Paulsen, M. B., & Pascarella, E. T. (2010). To see the world or stay at home: Applying an integrated student choice model to explore the gender gap in the intent to study abroad. *Research in Higher Education*, 51, 615-640.
- Salisbury, M. H., Paulsen, M. B., & Pascarella, E. T. (2011). Why do all the study abroad students look alike? Applying an integrated student choice model to explore differences in the factors that influence white and minority students' intent to study abroad. *Research in higher education*, 52, 123-150.
- Smalley, A. (2021, March 22). *Higher education responses to coronavirus (COVID-19)*. National Conference of State Legislatures. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/education/higher-education-responses-to-coronavirus-covid-19.aspx>
- Soria, K. M. & Troisi, J. (2013). Internationalization at home alternatives to study abroad: Implications for students' development of global, international, and intercultural competencies. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18, 261-282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315313496572>
- Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. The Guilford Press.
- Stearns, P. N. (2009). *Educating global citizens in college and universities: Challenges and opportunities*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stevens Initiative. (2020). 2020 survey of the virtual exchange field. The Aspen Institute. <https://www.stevensinitiative.org/resource/2022-survey-of-the-virtual-exchange-field-report/>
- Stevens Initiative (2021). *2021 survey of the virtual exchange field report*. The Aspen Institute. <https://www.stevensinitiative.org/resource/2021-survey-of-the-virtual-exchange-field-report-stevens-initiative/>
- Stevens Initiative. (2022a). *Virtual exchange impact and learning report*. The Aspen Institute. <https://www.stevensinitiative.org/resource/2022-virtual-exchange-impact-and-learning-report/>
- Stevens Initiative. (2022b). *2022 survey of the virtual exchange field report*. The Aspen Institute.

<https://www.stevensinitiative.org/resource/2022-survey-of-the-virtual-exchange-field-report/>

The Forum on Education Abroad (2020). 2020 State of the Field.

<https://www.forumea.org/uploads/1/4/4/6/144699749/2020-sof-covid-response-data.pdf>

The Forum on Education Abroad (2021). 2021 State of the Field Update.

<https://www.forumea.org/uploads/1/4/4/6/144699749/2021-sof-follow-up-covid-response-data.pdf>

The Forum on Education Abroad (2023). State of the field report: Data from the comprehensive 2022 survey. Author.

https://www.forumea.org/uploads/1/4/4/6/144699749/2022_state_of_the_field_survey_report_7-28_.pdf

The Forum on Education Abroad (n.d.). Glossary.

<https://www.forumea.org/glossary.html>

The Healthy Minds Network & American College Health Association. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 on college student mental well-being. Authors.

s://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/Healthy_Minds_NCHA_COVID_Survey_Report_FINAL.pdf

Tong, P., Tsung, L., An, I. S., & Zhou, Y (2022). Sustainable transition to studying abroad online during the COVID-19 pandemic: An ecological perspective. *Sustainability*, 14(23), 16307. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142316037>

Vande Berg, M., Paige, R. M., & Lou, K. H. (2012). *Student learning abroad: What our students are learning, what they're not, and what we can do about it*. Stylus.

Verzella, M. (2018). Virtual exchange between cross-cultural teams: A sustainable path to the internationalization of college courses. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal*, 11(3), 1-14. <https://td.journals.psu.edu/td/article/view/137>

Whatley, M. (2017). Financing study abroad: An exploration of the influence of financial factors on student study abroad patterns. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 21(5), 431-449. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315317697798>

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage.

Author Biography



Dr. Gudrun Nyunt is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education at Northern Illinois University. An Austria national, Dr. Nyunt brings a global lens to her work and research at U.S. higher education institutions. Dr. Nyunt holds a Ph.D. in Student Affairs from the University of Maryland. While most of her professional experience has been in the United States, working for residence life departments at various institutions and then as a faculty member, she also served as a Resident Director for the Fall 2012 Semester at Sea voyage and worked at Webster University's branch campus in Vienna for one year. Her research interests include study abroad, the experiences of international students at U.S. higher education institutions, and employment in higher education. She has published over 20 peer-reviewed articles in journals ranging from the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, the *Journal of College Student Development*, and *Frontiers – The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. From 2017-2020, Dr. Nyunt served as chair of ACPA's Commission for the Global Dimensions of Student Development.