University of Hawai‘i Study Abroad Center
External Program Review
February 26-28, 2018

Review Team:
Dan Gold, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Kimberly Jones, University of Arizona

This report summarizes our findings and recommendations, which are based on the self-study and supporting documents provided to us in advance of our campus visit and three days spent on-site at the University of Hawai‘i Mānoa. We are grateful to the many faculty, staff and administrators who facilitated our visit and took the time to meet with us, to answer our questions about the Study Abroad Center (SAC), and to engage in free-ranging discussions about how programs for outbound students are organized and supported at UHM. Although the specific subject of our review was the Study Abroad Center, we had meetings with individuals who support students as they explore and engage in a number of different types of “study away” programs, including international exchange programs and the National Student Exchange (NSE). We also met with people from other units that interface with the Study Abroad Center.¹

UHM students have many options for study away from the UHM campus, including UHM proprietary programs developed and overseen by SAC, Faculty Sponsored Study Tours (FaSST, also associated with SAC), individual self-designed Study Abroad program options (with oversight by SAC), exchange programs facilitated by the Mānoa International Exchange Center (MIX), and other programs sponsored by colleges, departments, and individual faculty. Students also have the opportunity to study away from campus at one of the other National Student Exchange campuses.

**Strengths of the Study Abroad Center**

The Study Abroad Center has many strengths, including the following:

SAC programs have a robust system of faculty council oversight for the UHM proprietary programs that typically send larger groups of students.

SAC offers faculty access to what is generally considered a premium professional development experience. The SAC and the Council on Study Abroad exercise care in the selection of RDs, and the application process pushes faculty to have a clearly defined research agenda for their time abroad, and to articulate how they will connect their teaching to the study abroad context. The value that faculty place on serving as an RD can be seen in the fact that most of the RDs we spoke to had served more than once—including one who had served a total of 5 times.

¹ Because it seems common at UHM to use the term “study abroad” to refer only to one particular type of study abroad program, we note that when we say “study abroad” in this report, we are referring to all types of programs that involve students studying outside the U.S. We also refer to “study away” experiences, by which we include all types of study abroad, as well as study in other U.S. locations, such as that made possible by National Student Exchange.
SAC benefits from significant faculty “buy-in.” We talked to members of the Council on Study Abroad, faculty who have served as Resident Directors (RDs), and faculty who have developed FaSST programs. Faculty appreciation of the value of study abroad and support for SAC programs are extremely strong among all of these groups.

SAC benefits from a very experienced and knowledgeable director, and Study Abroad Center advisors are knowledgeable and passionate about supporting students who want to study abroad.

SAC has a good infrastructure for training and orienting both outbound students and faculty directors, and offers significant logistical support, especially for students going on the standard SAC programs.

SAC offers a wide range of programs of various lengths, locations, and disciplines which serve the UHM student population well and have the capacity to accommodate potential growth in participant numbers.

SAC demonstrates alignment with UHM’s institutional learning outcomes and has clearly articulated goals for cultural competency and global citizenship.

**New Goals and Initiatives**

SAC has outlined the following as their key strategic goals for the next 5 years:

1. Achieve parity in Native Hawaiian and underrepresented students’ participation in the Study Abroad programs by appropriate advising and support services;
2. Embed Study Abroad Advisers within priority Colleges and Schools and increase the number of students going abroad. Placing Study Abroad Advisers in Colleges and Schools will continue to contribute to the initiative of streamlining students’ time to graduation rates by offering courses in Study Abroad programs that fulfill degree and graduation requirements;
3. Expand Study Abroad programs and course offerings in the Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) fields; and
4. Continue to contribute to pedagogy, research, and student learning through UHM faculty Resident Director appointments in Study Abroad Programs.

**Observations and Recommendations**

These are appropriate goals for the unit and good directions for SAC, particularly if study abroad is defined more generally as any type of program via which students study at a non-U.S. location. To help support these goals, and to best support the broader study away needs of the university, we offer the following recommendations.

*Embedded Advisors*
Regarding SAC Goal #2, embedding SA advisors in individual colleges is already underway, with the first SAC advisor being based in a college beginning a few weeks ago. While starting this model, the SAC should consider the following questions moving forward:

- If advisors are going to be doing basic advising for colleges, is there any chance of co-funding these positions with colleges? Also, if this model will add non-SAC duties to the advisors’ work load, attention must be given to ensure that both the individual workload and SAC advisors’ ability to manage SAC-specific work remains manageable and appropriate.
- If there are times of the year when study abroad advisors are already maxed out, there will need to be clear communication about that with partner colleges, especially if those busy times coincide with times that are also busy for academic advisors.
- Though physical presence alone should help increase overall participation numbers, it needs to be complemented by concrete strategies for curricular integration and career integration (such as detailed mapping of study abroad activity onto the participating departments’ majors and increased number of pre-approved study abroad course equivalents) to maximize the integration of study abroad into student academic and professional goals for each major and school.
- An important aspect of curricular integration, and a factor in increasing student participation in study away programs more generally, is to be sure that students on all study-away programs (not only SAC programs) are able to get preapproval for coursework that will count towards their UHM program requirements. From what we were told, there is currently not a clear process by which students in non-SAC programs can find out in advance what courses from other institutions will count toward their UHM program. If such a process does not currently exist, one should be developed. An example of how this might work can be seen here. Assuming it will not be realistic to embed SAC advisors into every school, attention needs to be given as to how to improve services and support for those colleges and students that will not have an embedded advisor. Similarly, with core faculty/staff moving physically away from the SAC center, maintaining the SAC main office’s ability to serve students and SAC faculty’s ability to communicate with each other effectively in a more dispersed environment is critical to maintaining continuity of operations.
- To better integrate study abroad advising and traditional academic advising, consider the possibility of adding Study Abroad advisors to the Council of Academic Advisors and adding a Study Abroad advisor to that group’s Board.

**Database**

Most study abroad offices of similar size and stature utilize a comprehensive database system (either homegrown or a commercially available product, such as TDS for Study Abroad). We strongly recommend that SAC identify the resources to purchase such a system. Benefits include: ability to maintain all information on programs, students, and application materials within one database; a robust search engine for students to identify programs and course equivalents; online management of student applications, application review, and all required student materials (including automated reminders and tracking);
dynamic updates of variable information on website (such as program dates, costs, etc.); and improved data reporting. Currently, all SAC webpages are static and uploaded individually (increasing the chance of having incorrect information available to students if not all pages with the same information are revised at the same time). Application materials are collected in hard copy and scanned in, and tracking is done via Excel spreadsheet or entered individually. A database significantly improves both staff efficiency and accuracy in these areas, thus saving a considerable amount of staff time which could be directed to other purposes. It also provides an effective way of immediately locating students abroad in time of emergency. With the new embedded advisor model, a database is also a very effective way of managing workflow when staff are more decentralized across campus.

Registration
An issue that came to our attention during the review was that fees were being charged to register SAC students by the Outreach College, and some students were not maintaining continuous enrollment. (That is, although all SAC students are registered in discreet classes while they are abroad, SAC student registration was at times happening much later than regular registration, so that enrollment wasn’t maintained). Dropping of enrollment could have myriad negative impacts on students (including visa status for international students and problems with financial aid disbursement). Our recommendation is that no gaps in enrollment occur for any students, and we hope that the relevant offices (SAC, Outreach, Financial Aid) can come together and mutually agree upon a solution that would avoid additional fees for students and minimize additional work for staff from the various offices, while still allowing students to maintain continuous enrollment. One solution other schools use is to place abroad students in a placeholder course (for the total number of credits for the program) for the entirety of time abroad, so that full-time enrollment is maintained, and then enter in the specific classes taken and grades earned upon return. This would resolve the issue of different starting dates for each program and would also reduce the burden on Outreach from having to input every course change that a student makes while on a program.

GPA requirement
Currently, SAC programs have a 3.0 GPA requirement. We suggest that the SAC and the faculty committee, Council on Study Abroad (CSA) consider lowering the GPA requirement to align with university standards for good standing. Some schools have utilized this method to help achieve diversity goals, as in some cases higher GPA requirements unintentionally exclude certain student groups. Not all programs may be suitable for a lower GPA requirement, but participation in select programs (particularly short-term, well-structured faculty-led programs with a low student:faculty ratio) may actually help such students achieve longer-term success in their academic careers.

Dedicated Study Away Resource Center
Again looking at peer institution practices, a dedicated multi-purpose space specifically for the various types of study away programs is critical for increasing the profile of study away programs across campus. Such a space need not be large, but should be in addition to existing staff offices. This
space would be the “entry point” for students and visitors to learn more about study away opportunities and could include activity such as: walk-in advising, open houses, information sessions, multicultural activities, activities to connect inbound with outbound and returned students, photo contests and other displays or exhibits highlighting specific programs, cultures, or relevant program information.

**Explore a Broader Definition of Study Abroad Programs**

SAC offers a nice selection of programs, most having faculty leaders and clear cultural learning outcomes. However, there is the risk of too narrowly defining what study abroad must be, which makes it harder to articulate with specific academic programs/units, and limits potential student participation. We would encourage SAC and the CSA to explore including the broadest range of program types into its portfolio, similar to the offerings that peer institutions utilize. This would include “proprietary” programs such as faculty-led programs which are developed specifically by the SAC and exchanges (both currently utilized by UHM) as well as affiliate programs, not currently used by UHM. Affiliate programs are developed and managed by outside organizations or universities and geared towards study abroad students from the US and/or other countries. The current quality and variety of affiliate programs that are available are such that they would make a valuable addition to the UHM portfolio and meet an expanded array of student academic and professional development needs without using additional resources to create homegrown programs. Reasons to explore an expanded program portfolio:

- Programs of all types are able to meet UHM needs, in terms of goals related to cultural immersion and global citizenship, quality of academics/safety/study support, standards, and specific disciplinary academic needs. While meeting the above goals and standards, a wider portfolio of offerings would offer students greater diversity in location, term, subject matter, housing/experience type, and cost. This would allow a greater possibility to match as many student motivating factors as possible in their program selection process, increasing the number of students who are able to fit study abroad into their academic careers.

- “Proprietary” programs are by far the most resource intensive type of program to create and manage. Utilizing affiliate and exchange programs to help support increased participation is a more efficient use of resources and staff time. Exchange relationships should be scrutinized carefully whenever they are initiated and renewed, in order to be sure they meet the needs of UHM. Similarly, external programs need to be thoroughly vetted to ensure that they meet SAC and UHM standards. However, an effective vetting process of an external program is much more efficient than creating an entirely new program to meet new student needs.

- Faculty involvement on-site is a strong program model and is a premium professional development experience for UHM faculty. However, potential student participation growth is such that it is possible to maintain these opportunities for faculty while including additional program types to students.

- A wider portfolio of programs may increase student participation better across majors. Faculty involvement in current SAC programs is not
equally distributed across departments. Some faculty members reported
going multiple times, with one faculty member having gone five times.
Faculty from smaller departments may have difficulty in taking advantage
of anything but a summer experience (course buy-out funds could help
alleviate this, if departments do not have the resources to invest in this
type of professional development activity for their faculty). Also, some
faculty may not be able to integrate the cultural learning objectives into
their disciplines and course offerings, especially if the goal is to provide
courses that meet program requirements in a particular major.

**Greater campus-wide collaboration for all study away activity**
The output of the SAC (in terms of program offerings, support for students
and faculty, pre-departure orientations, emergency support) appears to be
robust, professionalized, and within national standards for study abroad.
However, not all student mobility is managed within the SAC. MIX and NSE
function as separate offices. Additionally, it was difficult during our review
to ascertain how much, if any, study away activity (be it faculty-led
programs, students receiving credit for outside programs, or directed
studies) is being done independently outside of SAC, MIX or NSE. Specific
areas that would benefit from greater collaboration are as follows:

1. Safety and security management: Of all of the recommendations, this is
   the most critical, from a liability perspective, for UHM. Though SAC
   appears to have proper safety and security protocols, we observed that
   there is not collaboration in this realm with non-SAC student mobility
   (outside of enrolling MIX students in insurance). Having UHM sponsored
   student away activity outside of these SAC protocols, simply due to the
   administrative home of their programs, is highly problematic. We suggest
   a uniform safety and security approach for all university-affiliated student
   mobility, regardless of administrative home or program type. Specifically:

   o Insurance: ensure all students are enrolled in the same
     international insurance policy for duration of stay abroad
   o Uniform student statement of responsibility signed by all students
   o Uniform check of all participants prior to departure to confirm
     meeting of eligibility requirements and “good standing” status with
     the university
   o Health, safety and security pre-departure orientation for
     all participants
   o One university-wide emergency protocol and decision making
     process for handling student issues and emergencies abroad,
     including: one point of contact and coordination into the university
   o One database for recording all incidents and student issues abroad
   o One university-wide committee to set a standard policy regarding
     all university-affiliated student travel in relation to Department of
     State and CDC travel warnings (when travel is allowed, when it is
     not allowed, waiver process for requests for travel in travel warning
     locations) and to make decisions, to be applied equally for all
     student travel abroad. Create clear policies for undergraduate,
     professional and graduate students, and for faculty leading
students abroad.
- Specific training for all faculty leading students abroad across campus, including specific training by relevant support offices, such as Title IX coordinator and Clery coordinator.
- Consider adding a full-time international safety and security officer to focus on such issues, as is becoming more standard at peer institutions.

2. Shared marketing: embark in a joint effort for marketing all student mobility opportunities as possible, including: one website, one joint study abroad and study away fair, shared print materials, shared peer advisors, etc. Currently MIX and SAC have separate lists describing the differences between their respective programs. At a minimum both sites should use the same lists and present a neutral or positive view of each type of program.

3. If a Study Away Resource Center is established, have its activities be inclusive of all study away experiences. Programs of various types should be promoted equally to students, to enhance the chance that they will find the program that is best for their own individual circumstances.

4. The new database recommended above should be utilized by all study away programs on campus. Specifically, there should be one main web-based entry point for students and faculty to interface with all of the study away opportunities offered through UHM. This would include one online portal to search for, and apply for, all study away programs.

5. Establish one common point of communication and one common set of protocols for all study away offices with other offices on-campus, with whom collaboration is critical for the proper functioning of study away (such as outreach, foundation, bursar, title IX coordinator, financial aid). As study away touches on so many different aspects of student services and university administration, ensuring compliance and oversight of study away activity with all relevant policies and practices is crucial. We noted that the interface with offices (such as financial aid, title IX, Foundation, etc....) was not necessarily consistent between SAC and MIX, and could lead to different protocols being used for different groups of students abroad, based on which office administered their program. In addition, the university needs to establish clear policies on issues such as: when grades from study abroad programs should be posted (whether a student has or has not paid the study abroad fees should not be relevant); whether it is ever appropriate for a bursar’s hold for lack of payment to be lifted for a student who wishes to participate in study abroad, and who has the authority to do so; and under what circumstances a student’s grade from study abroad can be changed after it is posted.

6. As much as possible, standardize the support structures offered to students, regardless of which program they attend. Currently, it appears that the support a student receives depends very much on which office and which type of program a student attends. All should have equal quality of support, and students should ideally have equal access. You don’t want a situation in which less affluent students have difficulty accessing the programs that offer more support. To maximize student participation in all programs and to minimize the difference that administrative support has on student program selection, areas where all programs can be synchronized include:
   - Shared pre-departure orientation (outside of program specific
information)
  o Access to a consistent level of pre-departure advising
  o One online portal and process for students to apply
  o One billing process (though costs will continue to be program specific)
  o Shared access to scholarships and financial aid
  o Speedy notification of whether financial aid for a program will be available, and program deposit deadlines that fall after such notification will enhance students’ opportunities to take advantage of study abroad opportunities.
  o Shared administrative fees assessed for all students
  o Utilize the same process for approving all new programs (regardless of program type) and evaluating existing programs
  o Utilize one faculty oversight committee (CSA) for approving all programs and suggesting academic policy, not solely current SAC programs and policies. It is beneficial for the committee to review and approve new programs, and not the sponsoring faculty member or academic unit, to reduce conflicts of interests and to ensure objective review. Such a council should have a rotating membership such that there is always a combination of experienced members who know the programs and processes well, and new members who will bring a fresh perspective. You might consider term limits for representatives.
  o Shared process for course articulation and database of pre-approved course equivalents for all programs
  o Explore having the same credit type (graded UH credit v. Transfer credit) regardless of program type if possible
  o Shared support and activities for students once they return from study away
7. Standardize the support given to FaSST program faculty to align with current support given to SAC programs. Specifically, allow FaSST faculty to focus on syllabus and itinerary development and marketing and have SAC professional faculty/staff assist more actively in other areas, including the student application and selection process, budget creation, program vetting and approval process, and contract management for all fee for services arrangements. Moving to this model may increase the number of faculty interesting in running programs (and can focus on attracting departments and regions not currently well served), and would standardize quality and due diligence among all program offerings. This shift would probably require changing the current SAC half-time position to support FaSST activity into a full time 100% position, or perhaps adding an additional .5 FTE of support and distributing the additional work across the staff based on the different types of additional work required.
8. We were told that courses that included a FaSST experience were not necessarily flagged as such, so that students might register for a class without realizing there was a study abroad experience (and the related expenses) associated with the course. If this is the case, course sections incorporating related FaSST programs should be noted as such in the class schedule so that students are well informed before they register for a class and can plan accordingly.
9. Establish Shared Participation Goals: Specifically, SAC’s goals regarding student participation (achieve parity in Native Hawaiian and
underrepresented students’ participation, and offer more programs and course offerings in the Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) fields) could be best achieved if such goals were set campus-wide, utilizing all study away opportunities to achieve concrete quantified goals. Not every program can meet the needs of every student, but overall, the portfolio should be able to. For example, MIX or NSE exchange partners may already offer a myriad of suitable STEM options for students, without having to create new options within existing SAC faculty-led programs.

10. Include NSE in this model. As the administrative and student support needs for NSE and domestic programs are very similar to those of international programs, including NSE and domestic program administration within this model is recommended. It is important to ensure that NSE is given appropriate levels of resources and support to function as a core student mobility option with important benefits to students similar to the benefits of international programs.

To reduce risk and university liability, achieving centralization of the areas addressed in point #1 above is of critical concern. Ideally, the most effective way to enact all of the above suggestions is to have all study away activity centralized into one office. This model would reduce as much as possible administrative redundancies of “recreating the wheel,” ensure compliance and best practices are applied evenly throughout all activities, and make it as easy as possible for students to navigate their options. If fully combining the SAC, NSE and MIX offices is currently an unrealistic goal, benefits could still be achieved by looking at collaboration across offices in the specific points above. Any of the above collaborations have the benefit of reduced costs to the university and more efficient use of resources, increased visibility for the various programs, better and clearer support to students, and reduced liability to the university.

Though study abroad offices at US institutions viably report within a variety of different units (academic affairs, student life, international/global affairs), there is clear benefit to be in an internationally focused unit as a way to bring previously disparate study abroad related offices into one cohesive unit. A clearly defined and dedicated Chief International Officer overseeing the range of internationally related initiatives within the university, could bring all of the various student mobility related offices together to create an effective global strategy for student engagement. In many universities, this is a full-time position, and we recommend UHM consider this possibility.

Multiple stakeholders expressed a desire for increased direction from the top, and for increased communication. There was a feeling that bringing together related units under OIEP has been a step in the right direction, but that there was still a desire to collaborate with each other more than they do now. SAC has a long history of work in this area and is a valuable store of knowledge about best practices. The university and student would benefit from this knowledge being shared among all units involved in sending students.
Office Climate
During our short visit, it was clear that although structural change could effectively impact many of these recommendations, attention also needs to be given to relationships and office climate, both within the SAC and in interactions with other campus offices. Attention to professional development and cross training across study abroad office functions, developing a positive office climate with staff buy-in and involvement in overall office and study abroad strategic planning, and working collaboratively with other campus offices with shared goals and mutual understanding of each office’s goals and challenges would go a long way towards overall success in reaching strategic goals and better service to students.

Funding Considerations
Along with the above recommendations, we recommend exploring the following funding considerations:

- Ensure that all study away participants, and not only those on programs run through SAC, pay an administrative fee that helps support the endeavors of the study abroad office (this is in addition to the program specific fee/tuition that covers the costs of the specific program and in addition to insurance).
- As participants outside the SAC currently do not pay fees, capturing these fees would increase revenue even with static overall participation numbers. These fees could help support additional positions as needed, the database system, program development/site visits/assessment and marketing, and professional development. The above recommendations, even at static participation levels and combing all current staff from the three offices, may require the addition of 1-3 more staff members. Future increased participation would increase the amount of fees recovered, which in turn could be reinvested into additional staff as needed.
- Though we did not do an in-depth review of the current SAC budget, if additional immediate funding is needed to realize these recommendations, one approach would be to draw down the current SAC reserve to the level only where it needs to cover cash flow and not to the level needed to cover emergency contingencies. This could be enacted only if the university was willing to formally commit to covering emergency costs for SAC activity in times of crisis or need.
- Increase collaboration with the Foundation and other relevant organizations to secure more funding and grants for study abroad programs and student scholarships for all types of away programs. Although some work has been done, stakeholders seem to crave direction on this front. They need to know that this is a strategic goal of the university. Also, identify any internal funds, including student participation fees, that could be used for towards student scholarships.

Conclusion
In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that UHM has a solid foundation to build on as you work to enhance the accessibility and level of support for multiple types of study away programs, and to achieve the University’s goals of increasing the
number and diversity of students who study away from the UHM campus. Solid and well-supported programs of various types have the potential to be a “selling point” for the University, helping to attract in-state students who aspire to study outside the state. Embedded advisors and more intentional curricular mapping to help students see how a study away experience can fit seamlessly into their academic programs will help to recruit increasing numbers of diverse students.

We urge all stakeholders to consider the following values as they work together to continue to improve institutional support for study away in all its forms:

Flexibility and openness: We encourage everyone associated with any aspect of study away programs for UHM students to remain open to new possibilities as you consider multiple issues, including, but certainly not limited to, the following: How can you work together to better support your students? What types of programs can benefit your students? What types of coursework have a place in study abroad? What minimum requirements must a student meet in order to have the chance to study abroad?

Communication and collaboration: Improved communication and collaboration will decrease institutional risk and serve your students better than the current system.

Efficiency: Look for ways to build on your many strengths by consolidating support for study away programs, bringing stakeholders together to support a unified resource center, and investing in a shared database that will streamline functions, better manage risk, and reduce the paperwork burden on staff.

Clear strategic directions and policies: It is important to have clear and uniform policies and processes in place in all areas that touch on study away, as well as clear strategic direction that fully engages administrative units, academic departments, and individual faculty across campus.

We hope that the above recommendations and observations will bolster the strong faculty and administrative commitment to study away and help continue your strong tradition of supporting study away opportunities for UHM students.

Submitted March 8, 2018