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## Considering the History of Education Abroad Programs to Create Assignments Serving both the Academic & Professional Needs of Students

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# **Considering the History of Education Abroad Programs to Create Assignments Serving both the Academic & Professional Needs of Students**

Lara Smith-Sitton and Joan McRae

## **Abstract**

This contribution explores two technology-based assignments—a travel journal & video bio and a Wikipedia translation project—that were developed for implementation in study abroad courses. Developed in consideration of historical and contemporary study abroad program structures, instructors and program directors can modify and adapt the assignments described for many different courses and locations. Each assignment builds upon specific learning outcomes emphasizing international components that advance critical language, research, and writing skills. Secondary goals of these assignments are the creation of deliverables that articulate to future employers the depth and value of education abroad programs and how these experiences have prepared students who participate to engage in careers in the global marketplace. Learning objectives, considerations about technology requirements, frameworks of the assignments, and a rationale for the components are discussed in detail.

In the 21st century, college study abroad programs articulate four primary purposes or arguments for their value: “the curricular argument, the cross-cultural argument, the career enhancement argument, and the development argument” (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010, p. 8). Angela M. Passareilli and David A. Kolb (2012), recognizing these foci for study abroad programs, see the interconnectedness of the arguments and student benefit:

Study abroad programs are rich with possibilities for meaningful and transformative learning. . . . For students who move mindfully through the study abroad experience, it has the potential to change their world view,

provide a new perspective on their course of study, and yield a network of mindful-expanding relationships. (p. 137)

However, these researchers also note the potential for study abroad programs to become little more than “a glorified vacation,” contending that all involved with the teaching in international programs must understand student learning and ways to maximize their experiences: “Attention must be paid to designing a learning experience that helps students fully absorb and integrate their experiences at increasing levels of complexity” (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012, p. 138).

While this seems commonsensical, crafting study abroad assignments and programming can be challenging. What kinds of assignments and activities can result in impactful and unique learning in international settings? What components encourage student engagement and strong work product? How can technology expand traditional classroom assignments rooted in reflection, research, and skill acquisition for rich learning opportunities? In response to these questions, this essay will discuss two assignments created for study abroad writing and language courses: a travel journal with a video bio component and a Wikipedia translation project.

Each of these projects implements digital- and technology-based components that can be adapted and modified to serve a range of disciplines, classes, and locales. These assignments were crafted not only in consideration of the research questions cited above but also through an understanding of historical and contemporary goals for study abroad programs. The thought-process behind these assignments was to rely upon the places visited by and experiences of the students as resources. The assignments and related activities then tie directly to institutional and programmatic goals as well as employer needs and student interests. Our hope is that instructors

may gain new insights for these assignments or revisions of current projects for students in international teaching spaces. For example, a psychology student in London considering clinical practice might visit the Bethlem Royal Hospital Museum of the Mind and explore the 17<sup>th</sup> century work of Robert Burton entitled *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, which led to theoretical work regarding the value of writing in therapeutic practice. This student might pull from the information learned to create a video bio emphasizing their knowledge about the intersections of writing and mental illness treatment. A library sciences student studying in Paris might visit the American Library in Paris and find that there are opportunities for correction and expansion of the Wikipedia page in both French and English. This student would advance not only foreign language skills but also articulate knowledge acquired about how the American Library Association sought to support U.S. armed forces and other English-speaking individuals living in Paris during World War I. Both of these examples provide opportunities for students to connect historical explorations to contemporary concerns, including their professional interests.

### **From the Past to the Present: Goals in U.S. Study Abroad Programs**

According to data published by NAFSA: Institute of International Educators, in the 2015–16 school year, 325,332 of the 19,962,458 students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities participated in a study abroad program. This reflects an increase of 3.8% from 2014–15 (NAFSA, 2016). The opportunities for study abroad experiences and institutional support for U.S. college students has grown exponentially since the formalization of international learning pursuits started in the late 19th century. Originally, study abroad programs took young women from elite

northeastern colleges on a sort of “European Grand Tour,” which focused primarily on language acquisition, cultural exposure, and sightseeing (ASHE, Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012, p. 15). The growth and codification of international learning programs continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries with much broader foci on pedagogy, student development, and career-focused opportunities; in addition, these programs created a conduit for the federal government to promote Americanism abroad and prepare citizens for productive cultural engagement in the world (Mukherjee, 2012). As the places and purposes of study abroad expanded, students’ options for courses, assignments, and activities they could pursue also grew.

Early programs such as the Delaware Foreign Study Plan, founded in 1923 and continued until World War II, provided a model for modern-day, credit-earning study abroad structures. Originally envisioned as a travel-focused curriculum, this program became an academic immersion program in France where students earned academic credit for coursework at French universities under the direction and supervision of an American professor (Walton, 2005, p. 255). Eight students participated in the first trip in the early 1920s and approximately 1,200 students participated by the end of the program. This initiative was mutually beneficial to both American and French universities: French universities wanted to put forward the strength of their universities and build strong relationships between citizens in both countries post-WWI; the University of Delaware, specifically, wanted to build foreign relations and economic education programs to facilitate American business growth (Walton, 2005, pp. 160-161). Following World War II, this model was

expanded to include other initiatives beyond just single institution-based projects. Through legislative support, notably the National Defense Education Act, the Smith-Mundt Act, and Foreign Assistance Act, the Fulbright Program and Peace Corps joined and expanded the concept of study abroad initiatives to include other international academic and service options. In addition, substantial support through funding and government-sponsored organizations provided for more undergraduate international educational initiatives (ASHE et. al., 2012 p. 17). These changes revealed an acceptance of the potential for study abroad to do more than simply serve as a supplemental classroom or academic experience—study abroad was viewed as essential facet of American higher education in order to help U.S. citizens prepare for engagement in a range of diplomatic and professional endeavors in the world. It can be challenging for students to articulate clearly how specific study abroad experiences directly prepare students for professional goals, yet assignments that challenge students to make those connections and see how sharing their own preparedness creates opportunities that could grow enrollment and affirm rich value and impact discussions. It may be as well that the structures of these assignments allow for initiation before leaving and then are expanded in global spaces—a scaffolding approach.

As higher education study abroad programs ebbed and flowed through the last third of the 20th century—including weathering the impact of the Vietnam War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks—interest and support for international learning initiatives, which included study abroad, continued to grow. The purposes for these programs, however, were reshaped with

four primary motivations: global citizenship, economic competitiveness, peacemaking, and national security (Mukherjee, 2012, p. 85). With a public focus on accountability and value-based assessments surrounding the rising costs of higher education, recently many of the arguments in support of study abroad shifted away from the more general learning potentials related to cultural exposure and foreign language skills to purposes that connected to pre-professionalization topics such as career-preparedness and business growth in the global marketplace (Jon, Shin, & Fry, 2018, p. 2). A study conducted on behalf of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) (Hart Research Associates, 2006), *How Should Colleges Prepare Students to Succeed in Today's Global Economy*, captured that employers do not prioritize foreign language skills in new hires: only 3% of employers surveyed selected foreign language proficiency as one of the most important skills they look for in new hires. Yet, somewhat contradictorily, the same study also revealed that 46% of employers wanted colleges and universities to place more emphasis on proficiency in a foreign language. This seems to create an opportunity to demonstrate to employers and to students the value of foreign language study. Assignments that integrate language proficiency along with research, knowledge acquisition, and attention to detail give students a chance to explain to employers a specific learning experience and how they see the skills acquired transferring to their career responsibilities, particularly those in the global marketplace.

Ranked above the statistic regarding language proficiencies was a desire by business executives for colleges and universities to place more emphasis on “global

issues and developments and their implications in the future (72%) . . . the role of the United States in the world (60%) . . . [and] cultural values and traditional in America and other countries (53%)” (Hart Research Associates, 2006, p. 2). The report also cited that “63% of business executives interviewed [stated] that too many recent college graduates do not have the skills to be successful in today’s global economy . . . [and] nine in ten (87%) of employers agree that America’s colleges and universities need to raise the quality of student achievement to ensure the United States remains competitive in the global economy” (Hart Research Associates, 2006, p. 9). Interestingly, whereas the report identified the desire for more attention to learning outcomes inherent in study abroad programming, study abroad participation was not specifically discussed or even eluded to as a desired educational experience in the 2006 report. Crafting assignments that provide opportunities for our students to articulate what they uniquely experienced in education abroad programs and how their learning responded to the demands of today’s employers is essential.

Fast forward 12 years to July 2018, Hart Research Associates and the American Association of Colleges and Universities conducted a similar study with employers entitled *Fulfilling the American Dream: Liberal Education and the Future of Work*. This study, as well as several studies since the 2006 study, have directly examined the perspectives of employers about college-level study abroad programs. In 2018, 93% of business executives and hiring managers cited they would be *much more likely* to hire a recent college graduate with applied or project-based learning experiences—study abroad programs were specifically included in this category.

Studying abroad was ranked seventh as a valued facet of college education behind other endeavors such as internships, courses with significant writing assignments, and service-learning projects. The study cites that nearly 55% of employers would be *more likely* and nearly 20% would be *much more likely* to hire a student who pursued a study abroad experience (Hart Research Associates, 2018, p. 16). And while foreign language proficiency was still valued, it was placed last on the list of “key learning outcomes”: approximately 23% of business executives and hiring managers considered language skills other than English as very important. Interestingly, this research also revealed approximately 70% of those surveyed believed that college students are only “fairly effective in communicating about the skills and knowledge they have gained in college that will be important for workplace success” (Hart Research Associates, 2018, p. 4). If students are unable to explain the value of their educational experiences, they are not able to be competitive for jobs and careers they would like to pursue. Seizing the opportunity to help students make the connections and share these connections with others supports our work as teachers and program designers as well as helps students reach their personal and professional goals.

Data collected in recent years affirms that opportunities for study abroad experiences and institutional support for students continue to grow at American universities in part because these programs create valuable experiential learning experiences and because employers want to hire more “internationally competent personnel” (NAFSA, 2016, par. 1). Research confirms the value of studying abroad, including recognition by the AACU that “Diversity/Global Learning” is one of ten

high-impact educational practices (Kuh, 2008). Yet, another recent study found that nearly 40% of U.S. companies surveyed asserted they missed international business opportunities because of a lack of internationally competent personnel. This same report provided that “when 95% of consumers live outside of the United States, we cannot afford to ignore this essential aspect of higher education” (NAFSA, 2016). Employers want what is commonly described as “internationally competent personnel,” and this includes not only language, writing, and communication practices but also basic competencies relating to travel and transportation as well as the confidence, willingness, and desire to work outside of the U.S. (Slaughter, 2013).

The data points summarized here present a deeper understanding of the goals of higher education to respond to public and private sector demands for the focus of educational programming and the skills and competencies sought by today’s employers for engagement in the global marketplace. While study abroad experiences offer a range of transformational experiences for students, creating assignments that deliberately consider and articulate learning outcomes connected to narratives regarding professional growth, skill development, and career preparation can motivate students and financial stakeholders, as well as employers and governmental agencies, to continue to support study abroad academic initiatives in higher education.

### **Assignment One: Articulating Relevant Experience—Travel Journal and Video Bio Assignment**

This first assignment has two parts: first, a travel journal component and second, a short video bio building from a reflective writing entry. In a course that focuses

on writing and communication practices in the global marketplace,<sup>1</sup> this assignment challenges students to capture critical facets of their individual study abroad program and consider how their experiences may relate to their futures. Additionally, the assignment calls upon students to articulate specifically the skills and knowledge they acquired in a digital format that can be incorporated into a project portfolio, LinkedIn profile, or other web-based space. This assignment responds directly to the learning priorities valued most by employers:<sup>2</sup> oral communication, critical thinking/analytical reasoning, working independently, writing, and applying knowledge/skills to real-world settings (Hart Research Associates, 2018, p. 12).

The portion of the assignment that focuses on travel journal entries connects students' experiences abroad to common behavioral interview questions, which allow for advanced reflective writing exercises that give students the opportunity to look back and decipher what may have been important or significant about experience during their time abroad. Reflective writing exercises are commonplace in high school English and first-year college composition courses, so this facet of the assignment should be familiar to students. But here, the writings will have a different purpose and venue: students will deeply consider how the study abroad

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<sup>1</sup> This assignment would work well in courses such as management communications, workplace or business writing, or career-based courses that serve a variety of disciplines including English, languages, business, marketing, and communications.

<sup>2</sup> Research from a range of organizations confirms these skills are those most desired by employers and often where students fall short. The Hart Research Report series for the AACU provides an excellent resource; however, additional useful data can be accessed through the National Association of College and Employers (<http://www.nacweb.org>).

program has specifically prepared them for their career goals in a world where globally-competent and culturally-aware professionals are needed. The video bio is an extension of the writing component that calls students to articulate the value of their experience through a short digital clip that allows for development of strong oral communication skills and articulation of international experiences and competencies. The emphasis of this assignment is to tell the audience how they possess and advanced certain skills and abilities because of their educational experience outside of the U.S.

Kathleen Blake Yancey's work in reflection and metacognition in composition studies has consistently articulated the use of these practices to help students understand their experiences and develop knowledge in a range of contexts both inside and outside of the classroom. She writes specifically about the procedure of reflection:

Reflection is dialectical, putting multiple perspectives into play with each other in order to produce insight. Procedurally, reflection entails a *looking forward* to goals we might obtain as well as a *casting backward* to see where we have been. When we reflect, we thus *project* and *review*, often putting the projects and reviews in dialogue with each other. (Yancey, 2016, p. 123)

Again, what makes this assignment different than other travel writing or journal assignments is that students are guided by a series of prompts that mirror common behavioral or neurological interview questions—the same kinds of questions they may face when interviewing for jobs or graduate programs following their college studies. Inquiries such as “tell me about yourself” or “discuss a time when you had to take a leading role” have the potential to reveal challenges, triumphs, and skills

acquired or put into action in the study abroad program that highlight important learning and knowledge acquired in international settings. Students responding to the same questions who have not pursued a study abroad program will not be able to craft responses focused on competencies gained through learning in a different environment.

There are any number of resources—from magazine articles to books to career planning materials—that emphasize the importance of being prepared for interviews. Most cite that employers are seeking not just to learn about skills but to better understand how a candidate will likely perform under certain circumstances. One of the most effective ways for a candidate to connect their unique skills and experience is through stories that show what makes them distinctive. John Lees, author of *The Interview Expert: How to Get the Job You Want* and *Job Interviews: Top Answers to Tough Questions*, advises to write narratives in response to possible interview questions before interviews: “People buy into stories far more than they do evidence or data” (Gallo, 2012, par. 4). The stories should be focused, concise, and have a clear point that reveals something unique about an individual’s experience. This assignment takes the idea of a reflective travel journal and connects it to prompts that align with standard behavioral interview questions. Students gain important life-skills that help classroom reflective writing assignments have greater value beyond grade-based tasks. With a focus on the professional impact of this assignment, students may engage more with the content focus and learning outcomes.

Students are given the freedom to design their travel journals in the electronic format that best serves their individual needs. Giving students a choice in how to capture their reflections also gives the opportunity for explorations of digital tools that they may be familiar with or want to learn more about. As Miles Kimball (2005) explains in his work regarding ePortfolios, “Students grow as lifelong learners by managing their work, by using their discretion to choose which artifacts best show their accomplishments, and by explaining how those artifacts show a progress of learning” (p. 437). The technology needed for this assignment includes a computer or tablet and internet access, as well as familiarity or use of a digital platform such as Google Docs or Dropbox, an ePortfolio, or possibly a blogging platform (such as Wix, Wordpress, or Weebly). Students provide the instructor with access to the electronic repository for the assignment.

The assignment begins with an introduction to journaling and behavioral interview questions. Students receive short open access readings from online sources that provide a foundational understanding of these concepts before a class discussion that can include both in class and oral practice.<sup>3</sup> This becomes the framework for how students are to create the travel journal entries. A particularly good focus for drafting behavioral interview responses is the “STAR” method.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> There are a number of excellent resources for students exploring the topic of professional journaling and behavioral interviews, including “Want to be an Outstanding Leader? Keep a Journal” (Adler, 2016), “6 Ways Keeping a Journal Can Help Your Career (The Muse, 2012), “Behavioral Interviews” (Princeton, 2018), and “the 9 Most Common Behavioral Interview Questions and Answers” (Haden, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> The STAR Method is an acronym that stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Result. The approach commonly taught in business schools and used by career development programs is an effective writing framework for this assignment. There are a range of resources, including the description provided by the Yale Office of Career Strategy cited herein.

focus of each entry, however, must be within the context of the study abroad program or global or international competencies. Each story or vignette captured in the narratives reveals students' individual or small group experiences abroad. Students are then given an assignment summary that gives two different questions each week—they select one of the prompts. While students must keep each entry between 500 and 750 words, videos, images, and other visual components may supplement the written components of their digital journals.

Upon completion of the journals, a class discussion highlights the challenges and successes of the assignment. Students are asked to discuss how they managed their time in keeping up with a longitudinal project over the weeks of the course. Students can share narratives that they felt were particularly strong and learn from their classmates how they crafted entries for their assignments. Each student then selects one entry and expands it into a short video project that takes the written entry into action. Following a discussion about the use of video resumes and bios on LinkedIn and in project portfolios, students will create a two- to three-minute video that includes images and/or film as well as their voices to reveal unique experiences that capture something valuable about the study abroad experience that they believe will transfer to their lives outside of the classroom.

There are many examples of how students will develop these short video projects. The equipment needed is a video device—phone, tablet, camera, video camera, or even a GoPro. Students need their laptops for editing and sound recording. Twenty-first-century students are typically quite familiar with how to create short video projects—software usually comes installed with computers, or

free software is readily available for download and use. As far as topics and visuals, again, students have the freedom to produce the digital project however they would like—some may elect to be in the video or simply write a script and read it as a voice-over. For example, a student might elect to tell a short story about a challenge with navigating the Paris Metro, which might include historical research and a situation or problem they had to solve that shows their familiarity with this public transportation system and its use abroad. This, among other things, reveals a student's understanding of the transportation available and his or her confidence to navigate and travel in unfamiliar cities. Another student might elect to reveal a visit to the American Library in Paris, where he or she watched videos about European refugees in order to articulate the importance of understanding the sources for research when traveling or working abroad and how to access information. Connecting research to new situations would be valuable for any number of professions, including library sciences, writing, editing, publishing, and within specific business and nonprofit organizations. The options are limitless for the video bios. What is important here is the focus on written and oral communication, alongside of visual and digital projects, that allow students to develop effective ways to articulate the value of their time abroad for future employers or graduate programs as the imagined audience.

The assignment itself sets the formatting options for students and emphasizes the freedom they have to create a platform that works well for them. Recognizing the demands of being away from established study practices, students are challenged to find a time each week (or more often if more than a weekly journal

entry is required) when they will draft, edit, and proofread the short writing assignment. As previously mentioned, students are asked to generate a 500- to 750-word essay that connects an experience in the study abroad program to a selected behavioral interview question in the travel journal. The goal is to challenge students to be able to craft responses that pull from their time outside of the U.S. Below are 10 behavioral interview questions that students will craft responses to within the context of their experiences studying abroad:

- Tell me about a time when you acted as a team leader in an unfamiliar setting or situation.
- Tell me about a time when you had to resolve conflict with a team of individuals you did not know well.
- Tell me about a time when you took on a supporting role, rather than a leadership role, with a group of individuals you have not worked with in the past.
- Tell me about a time when you pursued an experience beyond what was required, and what you learned as a result of the initiative you took.
- Tell me about a time when you had to juggle too many tasks in a new setting, and how you managed to organize your time to complete what was essential.
- Identify three interesting places that you have visited that shaped your interests and personal or professional goals and articulate how and why.
- Describe a high-pressure situation that you experienced, and how you coped to move through the experience.
- Share an experience when you had to solve a problem creatively, and how technology or past experience enabled you to improve the situation.
- Describe a recent situation when you had to “think on your feet” and motivate others to join you.
- In what areas do you feel you have special expertise or unique knowledge, and how did you gain it?

The assignments are evaluated for clarity, creativity, writing mechanical concerns, and evidence of strong writing. Students are also graded on the use of the technology they selected—specifically, how their choice and the integration of technological tools strengthened the form and format of the entries.

Following the written entries, students select one and expand that answer with images, video, and sound. Students are encouraged to develop a project that they would feel comfortable placing in their project portfolio for an audience beyond the classroom. Students may elect to show pictures of sites and locations or include their images within those places. Here, written and oral communication practices come together. Students are revealing to employers unique skills, abilities, and experiences explored in settings beyond American classrooms that affirms their ability to work in diverse settings in the global marketplace. The focus is to highlight examples of global competence. Like the journal entries, the video bios are graded on the clarity of the message, strength of messaging (both written and oral communication components), creative approach, and use of technology.

The primary objective of the travel journal assignment is to challenge students to use reflective writing assignments as a tool for learning while developing a sustainable writing practice to serve long-term interests in careers with writing at the heart of the job descriptions. Whether students plan to write creatively, develop content for companies and organizations, or simply use journaling as a way to develop strong leadership and writing skills, the goal is to help students learn about themselves as writers and deliberately integrate writing into their professional and personal lives. The hope is that these assignments will provide a framework and

approach for other multimedia projects for either career-focused goals or possibly within organizations where storytelling and digital narratives are needed. Students invest a significant amount of time and money in study abroad academic programs—maximizing these programs will prompt deeper understanding of the many things students can learn in international settings.

The learning outcomes for this two-part assignment include:

- Students will demonstrate how experiences and assignments in study abroad programs respond to the skills and abilities desired by 21st-century employers.
- Students will be able to define and articulate what is meant by the term “internationally competent personnel.”
- Students will be able to apply principles of primary and secondary research in class assignments and articulate the value of the research method selected.
- Students will be able to collect evidence and consider diverse audiences in order to produce assignments focused on research and writing skills.
- Students will be able to engage in and appreciate the collaborative, social aspects of writing while using writing as a tool for learning and articulation of experience.
- Students will be able to effectively apply the grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions in written and digital deliverables.
- Students will be able to evaluate and articulate critiques of the work of others both professionally and constructively.
- Students will be able to produce a variety of writing and digital deliverables appropriate for professional project portfolios that will serve as evidence of research, collaboration, oral communication, project management, editing, and writing abilities.
- Students will be able to analyze the connections between written and oral communication through the incorporation of technology and visuals into assignments.

## **Assignment Two: Demonstrating Language and Translation**

### **Proficiency in a Wikipedia Project**

In a study abroad program for graduate students in a French language education program, the program leader designed an assignment that required learning how to edit, compose, and translate Wikipedia pages. This assignment was designed to show students the history and culture they were observing and studying as authentic products created through technology, as well as teach them to manipulate these tools for their own consumption. The centerpiece of the course's graded tasks is to create, edit, or amplify a translated Wikipedia page. Now the reputation for reliability of Wikipedia, "the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit," has been somewhat uneven since its inception in 2001. Skepticism about its value as a reference source or an information tool is prominent in most of the literature published since its inception (Abilock, 2012; Callison, 2008; Murey, 2008) and the fact that everyone can change or contribute to it, rendering its articles different from one day to the next, has even been used as a source of comedy on the late night Colbert Report (Brumm, Colbert, & Hoskinson, 2007).

And yet despite the caution of teachers, librarians, and comedians, "Wikipedia has become an essential source of knowledge on the internet" (Antin, 2011). People of all ages, students and non-students alike, use Wikipedia as a resource for finding information—intellectuals and computer geeks are major contributors, but so are professors, high school teachers, students, and everyday people. Moreover, Wikipedia itself has become a growing subject of research; it now maintains a page

to collect journal articles, books, and conference papers focused on it.<sup>5</sup> A recent study indicates that at least at the university level, faculty members' perceptions of Wikipedia are more positive than before (Soules, 2015), and faculty members are increasingly creating new and unique kinds of assignments that integrate either Wikipedia or a Wikipedia model. The key to using Wikipedia productively is educating students about how it works; prohibiting its use has obviously not been effective at any level of education, high school or university level. As students and teachers learn to modify and build articles, their confidence in Wikipedia as a tool grows stronger. In order to promote partnerships between their site and education, Wikipedia has established an education branch, "Wiki Education," to guide instructors in the design of their assignments.<sup>6</sup>

The global component of Wikipedia is one of its most appealing features; each country has its own branch, written in the official language(s) of the country. The translation of pages from one country and language to another has become essential for the wider dissemination of knowledge across the globe.

To this end, one of the assignments used in this graduate student study abroad trip is the translation of a Wikipedia page from French to English. Instead of being simply graded and filed away, students' projects will be published on Wikipedia, available to all, and contribute to the collective knowledge of English speakers

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<sup>5</sup>For lists of the academic work published about Wikipedia, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Academic\\_studies\\_of\\_Wikipedia#Journal\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Academic_studies_of_Wikipedia#Journal_articles). Accessed 11-05-2018.

<sup>6</sup> More information can be found at <https://wikiedu.org>; testimonials can be seen on the twitter feed: <https://twitter.com/WikiEducation>.

around the world. In order to complete this assignment successfully, two things are required: language competence in both French and English, as well as internet service. Students should have achieved an intermediate level of French or above (as measured by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines<sup>7</sup>) so they can maneuver comfortably between languages. In addition, students need access to reliable internet service while in their program, in this case Paris. The students in this program stay at New York University's housing facility in Paris, so we can be assured of a high speed and continuous coverage for uploading and editing purposes.

One of the major benefits of this Wikipedia translation assignment is learning about best, and worst, translation practices. As most of us know, languages do not translate word for word as much as meaning for meaning. It takes careful consideration on the part of the translator to render a thought, rather than just a word, into another language. Google translate and other machine translators can be of only limited assistance in the translation act, although students rarely recognize it until confronted with a machine translation that is incomprehensible. Wikipedia recognizes this fault and marks articles that have been "machine translated," with a designation of MT. It then collects these together on special pages designed to encourage editors proficient in various languages to give the articles particular

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012> for full details of the proficiency guidelines.

attention;<sup>8</sup> at the same time, Wikipedia has launched a project to investigate ways to perfect “machine translation.”<sup>9</sup>

Examination of a short section of an article about the small city of Pont du Chateau in France should illustrate this principle. The translated article is based on the city’s tourism website, composed in French, which has then been translated by machine into English with no human intervention and uploaded to Wikipedia. It was detected and added to the special page requesting further translation work. Evidence of its artificial translation can be seen most glaringly in the second sentence of the History section, by comparing the English, with its misplaced modifiers and inaccurate definitions, with the original French: “Become in the 13th century a true citadel with its ‘old castle’ and its single enclosure, Philippe Auguste made it a garrison city, it equipping soon with two new enclosures with towers, doors, Maigne, Bise, Barrière and carries vault of it, ramparts which one guesses in the plan of the old city.” This translation should read: “In the 13th century, Phillippe Auguste transformed the old chateau and its single wall into a real citadel; later he added two walls with towers, gates, and ramparts to turn it into a garrison city, as can be seen in the map of the old city.” Some earlier version of the original French must have included these details about “Maigne, Bise, Barrière and carries vault of

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<sup>8</sup> “Wikipedia articles needing cleanup after translation from French,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Wikipedia\\_articles\\_needing\\_cleanup\\_after\\_translati\\_on\\_from\\_French](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Wikipedia_articles_needing_cleanup_after_translati_on_from_French)

<sup>9</sup> See for example, this page on the Wikipedia Machine Translation Project: [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Machine\\_translation](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Machine_translation)

it” which now appear extraneous and incomprehensible in translation. Here is the entry and its translation

Guy de Dampierre s’empara de Pont-du-Château en 1212, pour le compte du roi de France, Philippe Auguste, lequel rattacha la ville à la couronne. Devenue au XIIIe siècle une véritable citadelle avec son « château vieux » et son unique enceinte, Philippe Auguste en fit une ville garnison, la dotant bientôt de deux nouvelles enceintes avec tours, portes et des remparts que l’on devine dans le plan de la vieille ville (“Pont-du-Château,” n.d).

Guy de Dampierre seized the town in 1212 on behalf of Philip II of France, which made the city a Crown possession. Become in the 13th century a true citadel with its "old castle" and its single enclosure, Philippe Auguste made it a garrison city, it equipping soon with two new enclosures with towers, doors, Maigne, Bise, Barrière and carries vault of it, ramparts which one guesses in the plan of the old city (“Pont-du-Château,” n.d). (This section under history and origins of the city on Wikipedia was translated with “machine translation.)

Many translated sites are in better condition than this extreme example, but can still benefit from the editing and potential expansion of a native speaker. A Wikipedia article in English on the Delacroix museum, for example, is quite abbreviated from its French counterpart. The 261 words of the French version of the section “History of the Museum,” has been pared down to a mere 91 words, eliminating the most salient details. An English editor could amplify this site by adding in the facts deleted in the transition from the French version, or might insert information from additional sources. Visiting the museum, for example, could afford an editor with a wealth of additional, reliable sources to flesh out the skeletal

information provided.<sup>10</sup> Their experience on location as well as their immediate contact with the subject both serve to inform their academic product.

Before beginning the assignment, students practice editing in Wikipedia and must become “autoconfirmed users,”—they must have a registered account of more than four days old and must have successfully made at least 10 edits. Educational modules on choosing articles and the how-tos of editing can be accessed by teacher design of a “course” with Wikipedia. Students familiarize themselves with the essentials of creating an article.<sup>11</sup>

To begin the assignment, students will first need to identify a French site that either needs to be created or translated, or they must identify an already translated site that would benefit from amplification, such as the example above for the Delacroix museum. Having the benefit of being on location in Paris, students can explore the places or people that interest them and then see if Wikipedia has a page in French, along with its corresponding page in English. Another approach is to consult the list of sites that have requested translation, find one that concerns a subject in Paris, and then seek out information about that place or person while in Paris. Yet another possibility is to seek information about a place in Paris or a

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<sup>10</sup> Delacroix museum: 6 rue de Furstenberg 75006 Paris

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musée\\_national\\_Eugène\\_Delacroix](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musée_national_Eugène_Delacroix)

<sup>11</sup> For directions on editing, students are required to read “Help: Editing”

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Editing>; for instructions on creating articles, students consult: “Your First Article” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Your\\_first\\_article](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Your_first_article);

they then practice in the “sandbox” space:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Article\\_wizard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Article_wizard); and finally begin to draft their article with the Article Wizard:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Article\\_wizard/CreateDraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Article_wizard/CreateDraft)

French citizen they have already heard about. For example, one student recently discovered a Facebook page for a French author of a book translated into English that she was researching (*The 6:41 to Paris* by Jean-Philippe Blondel), and discovered there was no Wikipedia page in English for him or his book. She contacted him via Facebook, interviewed him through instant messaging and integrated that information along with other published sources to construct a page for him and his book in English.<sup>12</sup>

After choosing a topic, students create a page in English to house the article they will translate from the French. They then begin the translation effort from French into the grammatically correct and neutral style required by Wikipedia. In Paris, they have the opportunity to seek out new sources to integrate into their article, perhaps even take a photograph to illustrate the topic. Projects are graded with a rubric that assesses the degree to which they meet the goals of the assignment.

The advantage of contributing to the Wikipedia encyclopedia project, rather than a traditional translation or research paper assignment, is the satisfaction and confidence that students derive from adding to the collective body of knowledge. At the same time, it is in our best interest to assure the quality of Wikipedia, so frequently consulted by our students, and which should be, and can be, a useful,

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<sup>12</sup> The articles were accepted and can be consulted here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_6:41\\_to\\_Paris](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_6:41_to_Paris) for the book; the author page is here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Philippe\\_Blondel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Philippe_Blondel). The original article in French is here: [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Philippe\\_Blondel](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Philippe_Blondel), but there is no French page yet for his best-selling book. The student's research process was documented by the student in an article published in the university's student magazine, *Collage* Fall 2018 pp. 20-21 (<https://www.mtsu.edu/collage/issues.php>).

accurate, and free tool for the whole world. Educating our students to create and translate Wikipedia pages is the key.

The learning outcomes set forth below are tied to specific facets within the assignment:

- In choosing their subjects, students will be able to discover culturally significant landmarks, establishments, or personalities to investigate while in Paris and articulate the cultural importance of these sites.
- Through the creation of their articles, students will learn to edit and contribute to Wikipedia and evaluate the accuracy of online information.
- By translating a chosen site from French to English, students will apply translation skills to render the French into English through the manipulation of vocabulary, idioms, and grammar.
- In editing their project for fluency in English, students will demonstrate skill in turning the stylistic nuances of French into a readable and neutrally-toned English, thus honing the precision of their English language skills.
- As they integrate additional information to their articles, students will demonstrate effective evaluation skills regarding the credibility of source material necessary to the construction of their articles.

## **Conclusion**

These two assignments consider the evolution of study abroad programs in American higher education with current goals for international academic initiatives and the needs of 21st-century employers. Each assignment builds upon specific learning outcomes in domestic courses by emphasizing international components that students may interact with because of their engagement outside of the U.S. And while versions of these assignments could also be modified for domestic projects, the purpose of these assignments is to show that the students have traveled outside

of the U.S. and these experiences give them an understanding of the complexities of working outside of their home country. Employers desire more “internationally competent personnel”—employees who have traveled abroad and are able to maneuver in spaces beyond U.S. borders—and these assignments. A line on a resume does not necessary articulate the depth and value of education abroad programming. The travel journal and video bio help students articulate valuable experiences in global marketplace that move beyond taking classes in another country. In addition, the Wikipedia assignment puts language skills in action and has students engaging in primary and secondary research as well as translation practices that reveal their attention to detail and ability to identify inaccuracies in resource tools.

The assignments also become more challenging with the incorporation of technology. The technological tools required in each assignment are resources most American students will have access to abroad; however, consideration of what might happen should a student lose their phone or tablet is also important in class discussions at the start of the assignment. Students might be encouraged to bring cameras or other tools that can not only enhance their assignments but also serve as back up technology aids in the event of damage or loss of devices.

Recognizing the desire for college learning to help prepare students directly for entry into today’s careers and job markets, these assignments build upon research, writing, communication, technology, and language skills acquired through undergraduate coursework and provide an opportunity for more development in each of these areas. And, of course, each deliverable—the travel journal and video

bio and the Wikipedia translation—provides students the opportunity to create assignments that have public audiences for their knowledge, skills, and expertise gained through the assignments where the research subject is in an international setting. In returning to the questions that shaped these assignments at the start of this project, these assignments, coupled with the understanding the many purposes of study abroad, allow instructors and program directors to craft assignments and experiences that serve the diverse goals of stakeholders, participants, and future beneficiaries of experiential learning initiatives available to university and college students. In addition, they give students examples and tools needed to articulate their readiness for working in the global marketplace given their experiences outside of the U.S.

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