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INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: STUDENT EVALUATION

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Evaluation of student performance during an international learning experience is a problem that faces all faculty directors. The problem arises for several reasons: (1) the faculty director must insure the academic integrity of the program, (2) students must be fairly evaluated, and (3) the environment doesn't ordinarily lend itself to the usual evaluation methods. Many international learning experiences involve considerable moving around and of ten do not revolve around a home base. Such movement without a home base further complicates the evaluation process.

We have found the usual written examination method of evaluation to be not acceptable for at least two reasons. First, there is often no good place to administer a written test. Secondly, we don't believe this method is the best way to reinforce the knowledge gained.

The method we have decided upon is similar to a term paper. We require that each student maintain a log book of significant impressions (both positive and negative) that the student gained from each academically related visit. The phrase academically related visit is used to distinguish content related visits from pleasure or pure sightseeing visits. Then, at the end of the trip each student is required to prepare a paper (usually 25-40 pages) from the notes in his or her Respective log book. Such a paper gives the student a permanent record of the experience in addition to being used as an evaluation mechanism.

A second and secondary means of evaluation is to recognize active Student participation (engaging in discussions, asking questions of speakers, and making observations within the study group). We have found that students fully informed of this dimension in a grading system generally enter into spirited and worthwhile discussions. Participation usually makes up from 10-20% of the students' final grade, with the balance of the grade coming from the aforementioned paper.