

Background

As with all successful collaborative efforts, the development of the *Maximizing Study Abroad* series has a long history and has involved the participation of many people. In 1999 the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota received funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Title VI Language Resource Center program to create a set of user-friendly materials on language and culture learning strategies designed to maximize students' study abroad experiences. This project was a logical extension of previous work conducted at CARLA on culture and language learning and strategies-based instruction that began in 1993.

During the period 1999-2003 the project leaders created, field-tested, and revised the following set of three guides as part of the *Maximizing Study Abroad* series:

Maximizing Study Abroad: A Students' Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use

Maximizing Study Abroad: A Program Professionals' Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use

Maximizing Study Abroad: A Language Instructors' Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use

Phases of the project

The initial writing phase (1999–2000)

The initial writing phase of this project took place during the 1999–2000 academic year. The writing team was led by Professor Andrew D. Cohen on the language learning strategies sections and Professor R. Michael Paige on the culture learning strategies sections. Two graduate research assistants, Julie C. Chi and James P. Lassegard, worked in collaboration with Professors Cohen and Paige throughout the initial development of the guides.

The field-testing and revision phase – part 1 (2000–2001)

The field-testing and revision phase of the project was coordinated by Dr. Barbara Kappler Mikk (University of Minnesota International Student and Scholar Services) during the 2000–2001 academic year. The three guides were piloted with volunteer groups of language instructors, students engaged in study abroad programs, and study abroad program professionals and advisers at the University of Minnesota and selected sites throughout the country. Based on the rich feedback received, the guides were extensively reformatted and revised to be more appealing and accessible to end-users.

The field-testing and implementation phase – part 2 (2001–2002)

During the third and final phase of field-testing and development of the guides, prototypes were used to fully explore the range of options in which the materials could be used effectively. The core leadership group (Cohen, Kappler Mikk, and Paige) worked with faculty and staff from

the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and the Learning Abroad Center at the University of Minnesota to demonstrate how the guides could be used in a wide range of teaching and study abroad contexts. As part of this demonstration phase, Margaret Meagher, a seasoned instructor of Spanish, taught a special study abroad section of beginning third-year Spanish using materials from the instructor and student guides. Each student in this special course section received a copy of the *Students' Guide*. Their response was very positive.

In addition to using the materials in a language course, special workshops were held in fall 2001 and spring 2002 for students planning to study abroad. Dr. Kappler Mikk facilitated another round of focus groups with language instructors from various language departments and program professionals from the Learning Abroad Center. In May 2002, CARLA sponsored an intensive workshop on how to use the guides, which attracted the participation of more than 40 language instructors and study abroad program professionals. Half of the participants were staff and faculty at the University of Minnesota, while the other half came from study abroad programs in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, Maryland, and Colorado. By fall 2002, the first editions of the *Students' Guide* and the *Program Professionals' Guide* were published as part of the CARLA working paper series. Both guides were widely circulated to a national audience of leaders in the field of study abroad, and the response from students and professionals indicated these publications met a national need.

Final development phase for the *Language Instructors' Guide* (2002–2003)

The third guide in the *Maximizing Study Abroad* series was targeted at the needs of language instructors, and while the materials and philosophy behind the guide were complementary to the first two guides, the needs and focus of the classroom language teacher in using the materials were quite different because not all students in language classrooms are directly preparing for study abroad. Given this difference, the authors and the development team at CARLA thought it was critical to take additional time to make sure the materials were further tested and revised by practicing language teachers.

In fall 2002, Meagher joined the team of authors to help create and revise activities for teachers to use in the classroom and to provide input on writing throughout the guide based on her experience in regularly using the materials in her Spanish classes at the University and with a group of Spanish instructors at a study abroad site in Spain. After another round of major revisions to the guide, a draft was circulated to a group of colleagues at the University of Minnesota, Brigham Young University, and St. Cloud State University who provided in-depth feedback and ideas to make the final guide appropriate for the language-teaching context. The first version of the *Language Instructors' Guide* was published in 2003.

Research on the guides and another round of revisions (2002–2006)

A U.S. Department of Education research project, “Maximizing study abroad through language and culture strategies,” began in September 2002 under the direction of Professors Cohen and Paige with active support from research assistants Holly Emert, Joseph Hoff, and Rachel Shively. The research included three related studies that investigated the use and impact of the *Maximizing Study Abroad* guidebook series for students, program professionals, and language instructors. The research questions for each of the three studies were:

Students: Do study abroad students use the strategies in the *Students' Guide* in order to deal with the target language and culture? How, and in which contexts, do they utilize these strategies? How frequently do they use the language and culture strategies?

Program Professionals: What are ways that program professionals use the *Program Professionals' Guide* in student orientation? How do they actually use the guide? How do they perceive the role of this guide in the student orientation process?

Language Instructors: In what ways do teachers use the *Language Instructors' Guide* in their language teaching and advising?

Based on the extensive feedback gleaned by the researchers from study participants, a core team of *Maximizing Study Abroad* authors decided to take on the task of crafting another revision to make the series the best that it could be. Cohen also brought insights he gained from using the *Students' Guide* annually in his undergraduate course, “Practical Language Learning for International Communication,” whose students tended to be either those returning from study abroad experiences or preparing to embark on them (or both). During 2005–2006, Cohen, Kappler Mikk, and Paige, along with Kyoung-Ah Nam (doctoral student and graduate assistant in Educational Policy and Administration) worked on several rounds of draft revisions to each section of the guides. The revised edition of the *Students' Guide* was published in August 2006 includes more materials to support language learning, additional student voices, and new activities.

Also as a result of the feedback from study abroad program professionals and language instructors, the three lead authors worked on merging, revising, and expanding the *Program Professionals'* and *Language Instructors'* guides into one comprehensive volume for use in a variety of study abroad and language instruction settings. This effort was led by Dr. Kappler Mikk with the active input of Professors Cohen and Paige and the tireless editing and desktop publishing support of Jennifer Schulz from the Office of International Programs. *Maximizing Study Abroad: An Instructional Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use* brings together the materials from both guides and adds facilitation support for the new activities found in the *Students' Guide*.

We are pleased to be able to share the thoroughly revised and field-tested *Maximizing Study Abroad* guides nationally with a broad audience of people involved in study abroad. As we all know, enhancing students' language and culture learning during their study abroad experiences is a holistic endeavor that ultimately requires the efforts of the students themselves, study abroad professionals, and language teachers. It is our greatest hope that these guides can provide support for the important goal of preparing students to make the most of their study abroad experiences.