

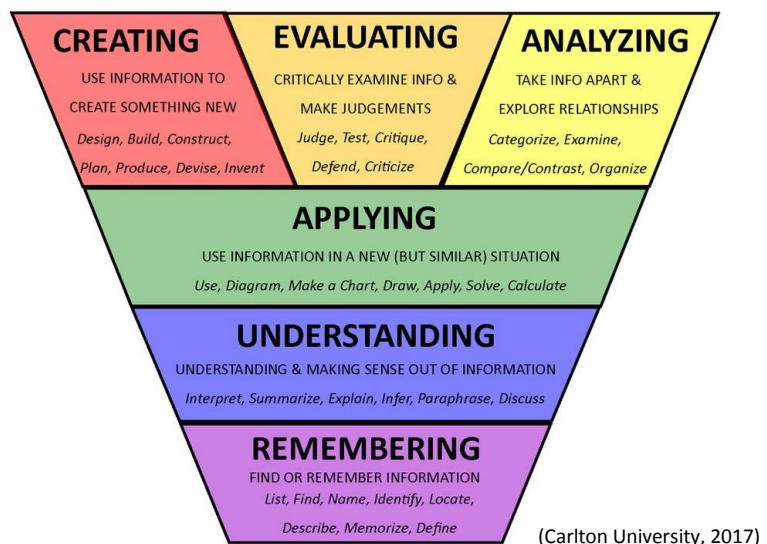
Connecting the Dots: Developing Learning Objectives that Align with Faculty-Led Program Design

Student-centered, project-based learning that aligns with Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle leads to deeper knowledge gain as students actively engage in their coursework and the abroad experience. Faculty-Led programs are not and should not be thought about as being the same as a standard classroom learning experience. “Learning does not occur as the environment imprints itself on the mind; it occurs through ongoing transactions between the individual and the environment, with humans the principal agents of their own learning” (Vande Berg, Paige, & Hemming Lou, 2012, p. 18). The intent of this paper is to guide you, as a faculty leader, on how to utilize the varying facets of the immersive atmosphere as you design the curriculum.

Imagine students who have reached the end of your program; what are two to four broad topics that you want your students to know? These topics should encapsulate the entire experience, not just discipline specific topics, and still be realistic to what you can accomplish. For example, students may encounter historical sites that contribute to their knowledge of the culture, but they would not be proficient enough to “know” that country’s history and culture at the end of the program unless significant coursework and assignments contributed to their knowledge.

As part of this, you will take into consideration what knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) you want your students to have at the conclusion of your program. Keep in mind which level of KSA’s that you expect your students will complete. By the end of your program, do you think your students will have moved beyond just understanding another culture, or will they be able to apply what they’ve learned to another situation?

Here is an example of an overall learning goal that is applicable to all faculty-led programs because of the level of interaction and knowledge gained: **Upon completion of this course, the students will have practiced intercultural awareness and skills.**



Once defined, the course goals will help to determine the learning objectives that you will put in place throughout the course and program experience that will lead students to reach the intended goals. Learning objectives should be specific and measurable because a well-designed objective will align with the assessment strategies. A common acronym that you can use when creating learning outcomes is SMART: specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and time-bound (Deardorff, 2015).

Here are a set of (generic) learning objectives that will help students attain the course goal above:

Students will be able to:

- **Demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the elements important to members of another culture in relation to history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices;**
- **Articulate aspects related to cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication;**

- **Explain and connect two or more cultures with some acknowledgement of power structures.**

An often-missed aspect of the curriculum design in faculty-led programs is to consider the activities will be occurring abroad. Those activities should directly tie to the course goals and actively contribute the learning objectives. Take the first bullet point above, **students would demonstrate sophisticated understanding by acting and speaking culturally appropriate during a dinner in the host country or when attending a business presentation.**

If an activity is purely touristic in nature, does it have a place in the course? Perhaps, but packing the program with touristic activities that do not directly contribute to student learning is not the goal of study abroad. That is not to say that when in Rome you should not see the Colosseum or in Dubai visit the World's Tallest building, but what it does mean is that you are required to provide context for those locations within the curriculum. Anyone can book a group tour, but what makes a faculty-led program different is the academic nature of the experience. Our students need to be prepared academically for what they will see and experience on location and the experiences should lead to the outcomes that you have determined for your course. Having an embedded course structure allows to students to learn the context for experience that they will have PRIOR to departure, so that the learning on the ground will be much more meaningful.

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