

From the Editor

This Special Issue is a collaboration between *Frontiers* and the Forum on Education Abroad. The idea for this volume came from the Forum's Committee on Outcomes Assessment, which initiated the Undergraduate Research Awards as a way to document the very best examples of student learning outcomes in education abroad. Members of that initial Committee were Mell Bolen, Lilli Engle, Pat Martin, Laura Siaya, Mick Vande Berg and myself. The first awards competition in 2004 yielded over 60 nominations from 40 Forum member institutions, including ones submitted by students from overseas institutions. Each application included an abstract, a detailed outline, and a faculty recommendation. A committee of faculty from various Forum member institutions and various academic disciplines chose the three winners: Heidi Boutros, Brian Hoyer, and Kevin McAdam.

Frontiers has had as its central mission the examination of the distinctive process and substantial outcomes of student learning abroad. The journal's strategic partnership with the Forum represents a shared interest in documenting and promoting the study abroad learning process. Previous Special Issues of *Frontiers* have focused on the many perspectives on study abroad learning, including language learning, science education abroad, experiential education in a study abroad context, the relation between area studies and study abroad, and a volume devoted exclusively to student learning outcomes.

The *Frontiers* editorial board viewed the Forum's Undergraduate Research Award as an opportunity for the journal to develop a series of Special Issues that would provide an in-depth examination of the value of a research approach to study abroad learning. We therefore invited the top 15 students in the competition to submit their full manuscripts for consideration. The eight student articles that appear in this volume were selected by the editorial board as excellent representations of the type of research of which students studying abroad are capable. In conceiving this special issue we were mindful of the context for student research. We wanted to be certain to include the perspectives of faculty advisors familiar with the students' research since faculty play the critical roles of mentoring, supporting, monitoring, sometimes collaborating with, and assessing the students. We asked faculty to relate their view of the students' research, especially how it relates to the students' entire undergraduate experience. We also asked faculty to consider ways in which the research conducted abroad furthers the aims of the relevant academic discipline. In this way, we hoped to inspire discussions about how disciplinary

curricula may incorporate research conducted abroad in order to advance the particular learning goals of major fields of study.

Two members of the Forum's Committee on Outcomes Assessment, Mell Bolen and Pat Martin, agreed to represent the views of education abroad professionals in this volume. They provide a useful perspective on how we as study abroad advisors and administrators may support the process of developing and promoting opportunities for undergraduate student research in education abroad.

We also felt strongly that hearing from the students themselves, apart from their research papers, was critically important, and also would be of great interest to our readers. The winners of the 2004 Forum Undergraduate Awards presented their projects to an eager audience of education abroad professionals at a plenary session at the Forum Annual Conference. This volume provides another opportunity for us to "hear" their voices. We therefore asked each of them to write about the "research context" of their projects so that readers would understand the ways in which the research related to the education abroad experience.

Following on a suggestion made by Kathy Sideli, Chair of the Forum Board of Directors, *Frontiers* and the Forum will be following the lives of these students and assess on an ongoing basis the impact of their research and study abroad experiences. We believe these students represent the most outstanding students who study abroad. Assessing the longitudinal impact of study abroad on these students will provide evidence for the tangible outcomes that education abroad has on our students. As a first step in that process we have asked each student to provide a short postscript in which they reflect, over a year after their graduation from their institutions, on how their research and study abroad experience continues to influence their lives. We will continue to provide yearly updates on these students and continue to track what are likely to be interesting careers and lives influenced by their research presented here.

It is important to note that this is the first in what we hope will be an ongoing series of Special Issues that present undergraduate research conducted as part of education abroad. The second round of the Forum's Undergraduate Research Awards have been completed, and we are already planning the 2006 Special Issue that will feature students' work from that competition.

Generous funding from the IFSA Foundation has made this entire project possible. *Frontiers* received a grant of \$30,000 from the IFSA Foundation to publish the first three Special Issues, and we thank them for recognizing the importance of this project for the field of education abroad.

Indeed, the *Frontiers* editorial board and the Forum believe strongly that one of the best measures of education abroad outcomes are volumes such as this one that showcase the very best examples of student learning. Both *Frontiers* and the Forum are committed to facilitating research on the outcomes of education abroad. This volume and those to follow are contributions to an ongoing effort that we hope will be useful in providing evidence of learning outcomes. We also have another goal: to inspire faculty and study abroad professionals to consider ways in which undergraduate research conducted as part of education abroad can form an essential part of our campus curricula.

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