

Title: Assessing Language and Beyond Through Study Abroad Online Journaling  
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Abstract:

Self-reflection is one of the tools that allow students to track their progress, pause and analyze their study abroad experience and exposure to culture and language and notice the changes in both their language abilities and personal growth. Journaling is not a new component to a study abroad program curriculum, and implementing it as a carefully structured component of the curriculum can contribute to participants' metacognitive awareness of the learning strategies they use when immersed into the target language and culture.

In summer 2017 two UNG Russian study abroad programs (one in Russia, the other one in the Baltics) piloted a structured journal using Microsoft OneNote application. OneNote Classroom Notebook focused on the assignments that incorporated language gain and cultural competence assessment at pre-, during and post-program stages.

Students were assigned daily entries in the target language, where they were asked to write 3 new words they learned, create sentences using these words; record an observation or a new fact of a host culture and post a photo of the day with an explanation of why it was chosen. Weekly essays based on the excursions and field trips were also assigned in Russian. In addition to this, students were expected to post reflection entries in English which prompted them to talk about highs and lows of the week as well as coping with challenges. The latter were used by program directors to stay informed about what is going on with the students' morale and experience of the program. Using the journals proved to be an effective tool in evaluating students' progress in acquiring language and cultural competence. Moreover, the overall response to the journaling component of the course was positive and the students were able to articulate what they achieved and how they handled the challenges.