

# 2022 Report on SIT Undergraduate Student Achievement in Interculturality

**Interculturality.** SIT defines interculturality as a learning experience of living and interacting between peoples and cultures based on equitable exchanges, dialogue, and mutual respect. Interculturality goes beyond passive coexistence and values of pluralism and seeks to build pathways between cultures and different ways of being and knowing. Because of the multifaceted dimensions of interculturality and how it manifests in our programs, we have developed several approaches to assessing student learning directly.

For the undergraduate portfolio, we have identified two areas where students demonstrate interculturality: language learning and internship experiences. Students on most SIT programs have the opportunity to study a language abroad. Many SIT programs offer language study at intermediate and advanced levels. Other programs offer beginning instruction in a less commonly taught language spoken by the local community. Students experience language immersion through homestays and interactions with community members. Internships provide students with opportunities to learn about organizational structure in a new cultural setting, learn how the theories of the program are practiced on the ground, be connected to a new social network, learn from and about the local work culture, and develop professional and cross-cultural communication skills. Furthermore, internships allow students to experience the daily life of locals who commute and work every day.

For both of these areas, we have embedded assessments to evaluate student learning and achievement. Many of our language courses utilize ACTFL scales of language proficiency for placement and/or exit evaluation. Among the assessments for internship performance is the evaluation by the site supervisor. SIT's challenge has been to access these assessment results and determine if they are appropriate for program, CGI, and division level assessment (decentralized management of undergraduate programs is a necessary feature of SIT's operations, but creates challenges in building direct relationships with responsible program staff and teachers). In AY 2021-2022, SIT piloted two initiatives aimed at resolving this challenge. A summary of these pilots and their results follows.

**Language Proficiency.** In July 2021, we established a World Languages working group comprised of undergraduate faculty and staff. Part of their remit was to review how language proficiency is assessed across programs, languages, locations, and modalities. The working group surveyed language faculty on assessment methods and instruments. The results of this survey were used to design an instrument to collect data on language proficiency, looking at placement and exit levels and ACTFL oral proficiency scores. We piloted this instrument in 2022, requesting data from fall 2021 and spring 2022 Spanish, French, and Arabic language courses.

While the data demonstrate that students typically exit the semester at least one level higher than they entered, we found more compelling analysis when programs conducted entry and exit proficiency testing utilizing a standardized instrument. For example, several of the Arabic language courses use ACTFL scales to evaluate students' oral proficiency at the beginning and end of the program. This practice allows for comparisons, giving us the ability to measure change in performance. We have collected the entry and exit scores for 39 students enrolled in an Arabic language course in fall 2021 and spring 2022, representing 34% of all students enrolled in Arabic language courses during this timeframe. After ascribing an evenly distributed point value to each ACTFL dimension (novice low = 1pt; distinguished = 11pts) and aggregating the scores for fall 2021 and spring 2022, we can see that these 39 students improved their entry scores by 39.6% by the end of their program. When comparing entry and exit means, students' exit scores were higher by 14 percentage points, for 38.8% improvement overall.

### AGGREGATED, WEIGHTED ACTFL SCORES: ORAL PROFICIENCY ARABIC FALL 2021 AND SPRING 2022

n=39 students, maximum points available = 429

Entry (pts)	Exit (pts)	Change (pts)	Change %	Entry %	Exit %	Change (% pts)	Change %
154	215	61	<b>39.6%</b>	36%	50%	14	<b>38.8%</b>

Although the dataset is small, the analysis demonstrates that this approach can yield useful information about student learning. It also inspires ideas to improve our practice of evaluating students' oral proficiency and our systems of collecting and analyzing data. Because ACTFL allows for more granular analysis, we have the opportunity to explore the use of a universal OPI rubric that would provide more insight into the dimensions of oral proficiency where students demonstrate their learning. Future studies can also look at the training and preparation of faculty in using ACTFL for evaluation of students' language proficiency.

The adoption of a common instrument would also resolve one of the primary obstacles to compiling and analyzing language proficiency data: the evaluation criteria employed by the language units varied across programs, courses, and languages. While most used ACTFL scores, they did not use it for both entry and exit evaluations. The remaining instructors used an alternative to ACTFL, making it difficult to compare assessment results across programs and languages. A common instrument centrally distributed would go a step further to improve data gathering. Asking each language unit to enter their assessment data onto an Excel spreadsheet was helpful, but it led to a disparate array of files that then needed to be compiled. SIT's cloud-based solutions could not be accessed by all language instructors as not all are full-time staff members with such access. To streamline this process, we could send a standardized form asking language instructors to input the assessment

information for their students. This would allow all of the information to be compiled in one document that is ready for coding and analysis, and it would lessen the burden on instructors to code and analyze their data themselves prior to submitting. Considering SIT’s commitment to championing language learning, this area is of special importance for the institution.

**Skills: Intercultural Competence.** To ascertain whether students enrolled in Virtual Internship gain intercultural knowledge and skills through their experiences, we examined site supervisor’s narrative feedback on student performance, as summarized by the Academic Director. We narrowed this study to the Virtual Internships offered in the Global Health & Well-being and Climate & Environment CGIs. These CGIs were selected, in part, because of their emphasis on fieldwork and community engagement. In reviewing the comments from fall 2020, spring 2021, and fall 2021 semesters, we identified that 27 out of 35 of the summaries of the Supervisor’s comments related to the Interculturality Learning Outcome. A qualitative analysis of comments identified four thematic clusters pertaining to interculturality: community/local engagement; cross-cultural communication/cultural differences; teamwork/working in multicultural teams; and country-specific knowledge/regional knowledge.

THEME	# REFERENCES	REPRESENTATIVE COMMENTS
Community/Local Engagement	15	<p>“and their valuable work with the local communities such as trainings on topics related to landscape restoration... “</p> <p>“made positive impacts to local students’ peers in Vietnam via online methods.”</p> <p>“gained a thorough understanding of sustainability and local communities, as well as WADI’s valuable work with local communities</p>
Cross-Cultural Communication / Cultural Differences	11	<p>...”This experience helped the student acquiring many skills, including cultural communication with different communities”</p> <p>“and adjusted to the cross- cultural differences”</p> <p>“understand each other amidst cultural differences and working styles”</p> <p>“she also learned local cultural characteristics.”</p>

Teamwork / Working in Multicultural Teams	6	<p>“the student worked hand by hand with members of the foundation”</p> <p>“Being a part of the festival organizers WhatsApp group allowed her to follow daily updates providing her rich cultural experience-”</p>
Country-specific knowledge / Regional knowledge	15	<p>“gained some knowledge about Vietnamese culture and history, such as colonialism, ethnic minorities and education...”</p> <p>“showed great interest and willingness to work on the topic of oil industry impacts in the Ecuadorian Amazon Region”</p> <p>“obtaining an experience and a deep understanding of the role of social networking sites in Jordan and its impact in the field of humanitarian work...”</p> <p>“The internship helped to broaden her understanding of maternal and child health issues in the Indian context and prepared her to apply this knowledge in the global health context as well.”</p>

This analysis indicates that the students participating in the Virtual Internships gain valuable intercultural skills and knowledge through their experiences working with local organizations. Notably, one virtual internship program had no comments that pertained to interculturality. There is also variation in how supervisor’s comments are solicited. Through this assessment activity, we see opportunities to review and revise the process for gathering supervisor’s evaluations with the potential to include a prompt on interculturality.

**Skills: Cross-Cultural Communication.** Student self-reported data on end of semester surveys and post-program surveys confirm that they recognize their enhanced intercultural skills as a result of their SIT experiences. Using a 5-point Likert scale, students evaluate their Virtual Internship learning experience as a source for improving cross-cultural competence. Since SIT began offering Virtual Internships, students have consistently given high ratings that have improved steadily, from 4.43 in Fall 2020 to 4.75 in Spring 2022.

## Study Abroad *Online Internship*

Semester		F20	SP21	F21	SP22
Expected		28	64	21	18
Received		15	31	13	4
% Received		54%	48%	62%	22%
My ability to collaborate and communicate in a cross-cultural environment improved as a result of my internship.	Mean	<b>4.43</b>	<b>4.68</b>	<b>4.69</b>	<b>4.75</b>
	SD	0.62	0.47	0.46	0.43

Importantly, scores for Online Internships are on par with Immersive Internships. Students pursuing the immersive internship option overall concur that their experience improved their ability to communicate and collaborate with others in a cross-cultural setting, yielding consistently high scores, peaking at 4.75 in Fall 2020.

## Study Abroad *Immersive Internship*

Semester		F18	SP19	F19	F20	SP21	F21	SP22
Expected		791	828	698	20	50	284	386
Received		499	486	408	10	23	127	144
% Received		63%	59%	58%	50%	46%	45%	37%
My ability to collaborate and communicate in a cross-cultural environment improved as a result of my internship.	Mean	<b>4.39</b>	<b>4.43</b>	<b>4.38</b>	<b>4.75</b>	<b>4.38</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>4.65</b>
	SD	0.81	0.79	0.91	0.43	0.7	0.54	0.67

In design, the internship is an ethnographic experience wherein students interact with the local population in a professional context and in doing so they learn from and about the local work culture. Based on their responses, students agree that internships, both virtual and immersive, offer opportunities for them to hone their ability to work and communicate in cross-cultural environments.

Despite not being direct measures, students' self-appraisal of their achievement is an important measure within an experiential learning model that privileges reflection. The longevity of these perceptions are captured in the Post-Program surveys SIT distributed to Study Abroad alumni. More broadly, the results from the Post-Program Survey of students who enrolled in a Study Abroad program in Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 demonstrate the continued value students have placed on their SIT program to strengthen their intercultural skills.

DISTRIBUTION OF SCORES						
My intercultural skills are stronger because of my participation in this program.	5	4	3	2	1	MEAN
	53%	32%	12%	0	3.85	4.29

n = 78

More broadly, the results from the Post-Program Survey of students who enrolled in an undergraduate program in spring 2020, fall 2020, and spring 2021 demonstrate the continued value students have placed on their SIT program to strengthen their intercultural skills. As illustrated in the table below, an overwhelming majority of alumni recognize the positive impact of their study abroad educational experience on their intercultural skills, with 58% of alumni indicating strong agreement and 32% in agreement with the statement that their skills are stronger because of their participation.