

Signature Assignment: Evaluation Plan

Northeastern University Dialogues of Civilization Programs

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Introduction

Northeastern University is one of the nation's leading institutions in experiential learning. As a result, undergraduate students across all programs must complete one experiential component to graduate. The primary methods student can complete this requirement are through cooperative education, research, or creative activity; XN project-based experiences; service-learning; and global experience (Northeastern University, 2022)—Dialogues of Civilization are one such global experience. Since dialogues are not required but rather fulfill a requirement, not all students will participate in a dialogue. The goal is that those that do participate get the same high-quality experience that any other experiential component would provide. As such, this evaluation will aim to assess the quality of the Dialogues of Civilization program on enriching the student experience and providing quality experiential learning.

The Program

The program that will be evaluated is the Dialogues of Civilization (DOC) program at Northeastern University. DOC programs are overseen by the Global Experience Office (GEO) of Northeastern University, and each one is led by Northeastern faculty during the Summer 1 or Summer 2 terms. Each DOC is a short-term international program, spanning 4-6 weeks abroad with a Northeastern faculty lead and a program assistant to learn about a specific topic or subject (Northeastern Global Experience Office, 2023). Most programs are major or minor-specific, and are the equivalent of 8 semester hours, or two courses (Northeastern Global Experience Office, 2023). As of 2019, the DOC programs have been taken by 1375 students, with 69 programs in 41 countries on 5 continents (Northeastern Global Experience Office, 2023). As such, this program is fully developed and established at the time of this evaluation.

Northeastern University is an interdisciplinary institution; as a result, the Dialogues of Civilization represent a collaboration of faculty across multiple departments to engage in global experiential learning. In addition, the DOCs on offer change annually. Therefore, this evaluation plan reflects this and encompasses the entire DOC program rather than one single dialogue. The programs' stakeholders include students, parents, faculty, staff, university leadership, and academic departments. In addition, external organizations are engaged; they are key players in the DOC courses as they are integral to the course materials and experiences for students abroad.

Logic Model (structure adapted from CDC, 2011)

To effectively summarize the main elements of the program, a logic model will be used. This structure is adapted from the CDC (2011) guidance on developing an effective evaluation plan. A logic model also provides the added benefit of helping to focus the evaluation design, questions, and methods to ensure the evaluation is as impactful and useful as possible (CDC, 2011). This model separates information into four categories: inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Inputs represent the requirements to participate in the program; activities take place during the program and produce outputs and outcomes. Outputs and outcomes are

similar, as they represent results of input and activities; however, in this case outputs are specific deliverables and actionable items and outcomes are more qualitative developments within a student.

Inputs

DOC fairs and program information sessions for marketing to students; application and health and safety support from GEO Global Ambassadors and Advisors; faculty-student interviews; pre-departure orientations (Northeastern Global Experience Office, 2023); DOC fee + Northeastern tuition (Northeastern University Global Experience, n.d.-b).

Activities

Each DOC has different activities that surround their themes, but all are structured with the following:

- Planned daily schedule made up of classes, events, excursions, and activities (Northeastern Global Experience Office, 2023)
- Connection and exposure to “local industries, cultural sites, and faculty” (Northeastern Global Experience Office, 2023)

Outputs

Deliverables as outlined by the faculty member and the specific DOC program syllabus, area of study, and program location.

Outcomes

Outcomes for students include: “personal growth & increased self-confidence; resume building; networking skills & global career development; improved foreign language skills; increased cultural awareness & sensitivity; development of cross-cultural communication skills; establishment of new relationships” (Northeastern University Global Experience, n.d.-a). Students are also prepared for employment and life post-graduation through experiential learning by combining classroom learning outcomes and material with real-world experiences (Northeastern University, 2022).

Purpose and Resources

The Dialogues of Civilization program is intended to be a robust and engaging program for students to grow and develop in areas of academic and professional skills, as well as self-confidence. To ensure a successful evaluation, additional time and energy from existing GEO staff is required. Focus groups and the post-program survey, detailed in Appendix A of this paper, will require moderators, data collectors, and staff to organize, prepare, and distribute final reports on this evaluation's findings.

Additional useful information to gather includes syllabi from instructors and itineraries for the trip, if not already included in the syllabus. This allows the GEO office to examine responses

from dialogue participants and compare them to what the structure of their program looked like. One of the tools for this evaluation, further detailed in this paper's method section, comes from an online form used by the GEO staff to collect information on DOC participants. Form responses should be provided to staff collecting and synthesizing data.

At the end of this evaluation process, the GEO office will have collected and synthesized information that includes survey data and focus group discussion. It is intended to be collected in a single packet and presented as a PowerPoint ahead of making any alterations to the current program structure.

This evaluation seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How effectively does the Dialogues of Civilization program enrich the student experience through personal, social, and emotional development? Is it more or less than other programs that fulfill the experiential requirement?
- 2) How effectively does the Dialogues of Civilization program enrich the student experience through preparation for careers and employment? Is it more or less than other programs that fulfill the experiential requirement?
- 3) Who gets the most out of this experience? Is it participants, program assistants, or faculty?
- 4) Does each DOC achieve the same results? Where are the differences between the programs?

Method

Three data tools were identified and created for this evaluation: (1) an existing online form collected by Global Experience Office via the GEO website, (2) a newly developed post-program survey to be sent to participants, and (3) a series of focus groups. Syllabi and itineraries for these programs can provide additional context to feedback from these tools but are not necessarily indications of program quality without additional analysis. The tools used in this evaluation plan will provide data to help us find answers to each of our evaluation questions. All three tools will be applicable to evaluation questions 1 and 2; the focus group will act as the main source of data for evaluation question 3; and both the post-program survey and the focus groups will be used for evaluation question 4.

The form and focus groups will provide qualitative data, focusing on narratives directly from students, program assistants, and faculty who participate or run the DOCs. For each of the Summer 1 and Summer 2 terms, five focus groups will be compiled: three student groups, one program assistant group, and one faculty group. This allocation is intentional, as there are far more students who participate in dialogues than there are program assistants and faculty that run them. Each focus group will have 5-10 people, and GEO staff members will act as moderators to lead them through five open ended questions. The GEO form asks students to describe their experience with the DOC program in broad terms; however, it is still a useful tool

to collect narrative and qualitative data from students who are unable to attend a focus group session.

The TRACE (Teacher Rating and Course Evaluation) system, as administered by the Registrar’s and Provost’s Offices, collects course evaluation responses for undergraduate and graduate courses at Northeastern University (Northeastern University, 2023). Unfortunately, DOC programs are not required to be evaluated through TRACE. As a result, a new survey tool has been developed. Some questions from TRACE have been utilized. A complete list of survey questions is included in Appendix A. The survey is designed utilizing questions with a five-point Likert scale and will generate quantitative data.

An example timeline has been developed using the 2022-2023 Northeastern University Academic Calendar. Dates listed are target dates based on this schedule. The data collected from each term’s post-program survey will be compiled by a designated administrator in the GEO who is affiliated with the DOC program. The moderators of the focus groups will submit a written report detailing participants’ responses to questions and other key discussion notes, and this will be compiled and shared within 24 hours of the focus group sessions. At the conclusion of the Full Summer semester, a synthesis of the data collected across Summer 1 and Summer 2 will be conducted, with results disseminated the week following this analysis.

General Timeline	AY 2022-2023	Evaluative Action
<i>Summer 1 Dialogues of Civilization</i>		
Last week of Summer 1	June 25-July 1	Post-program survey emailed out
In the week after DOC	July 9-July 15	Survey closes
In the month after DOC	July 9-August 5	Focus groups for Summer 1 meet
<i>Summer 2 Dialogues of Civilization</i>		
Last week of Summer 2	August 20-August 26	Post-program survey emailed out
In the week after DOC	September 3-September 9	Survey closes
In the month after DOC	September 3-September 30	Focus groups for Summer 2 meet
<i>After Full Summer</i>		
At the conclusion of both Summer 1 and Summer 2 processes	October 1-October 7	GEO staff collect data from all sources and organize into a single comprehensive document
After data synthesis	October 8-October 14	Presentation to GEO staff who coordinate the DOC program, particularly the decisionmakers
After presentation	October 15+	Add additional data or analysis from presentation and discussion; present to institutional leadership as needed

Dissemination Plan

Results and findings should be shared first with GEO and DOC staff, particularly those who handle planning at the program level. A large group discussion should occur in which moderators and the survey designee go over what has been discovered, and to open the floor to questions from their team members—it is important to engage in a discussion after data collection, as other faculty and staff outside of those already involved might ask questions that prompt additional information or clarifications that might not have otherwise been included in the report. A single document (preferably a PDF) containing survey results, charts, and focus group discussion notes should be distributed via email ahead of time and in print at this meeting. Any alterations or additions to this document must be made for a final data compilation.

Since data collected in this evaluation comes from participants, program assistants, and faculty, these results should inform programmatic changes in a variety of areas. Information from participants could highlight areas of change to processes and applications, or in the kinds and frequency of experiences on a given trip. This analysis can also be comparative, as the goal is to engage with people from a variety of dialogues; perhaps one dialogue is more successful in scheduling experiences, or one faculty member strongly incorporates their program assistants. In cases of this kind of comparative analysis, ideas can be freely shared and implemented across dialogues for overall improvement.

As previously mentioned, DOCs satisfy a university requirement; therefore, any major changes or alterations to program structure require validation across various levels of influence and more institutional approval than a change of a degree program. With the growth of the DOC program since its creation and the continued success of some of the long-standing DOCs, we do not anticipate this evaluation to highlight any major or systemic problems that require immediate intervention at this time; however, should more systemic changes need to be made, the revised document containing evaluation data and observations should be presented by senior GEO leadership to the Provost's office.

Summary

This evaluation plan aims to assess to what extent the Northeastern University Dialogues of Civilization program enriches the student experience and delivers quality experiential learning. As these programs change each year and are offered from departments across the university, these are essential questions to ask. As a result of this evaluation, the Global Experience Office will have a better understanding of the value and skills students gain from their DOC experiences as well as understanding the experiences of program assistants and faculty who implement these summer programs.

To improve assessment practices and support continuous improvement after each DOC is complete, faculty should compile and submit a portfolio of examples of student work, with examples spanning high, medium, and low-quality work moving forward. This would build a

meaningful indirect measure and would provide the Global Experience Office with high quality feedback after each dialogue. To expand on this further, faculty may consider building into syllabi a requirement for students to prepare a portfolio of their experiences throughout the semester on their program, setting goals at the start and reflecting at the conclusion of the program.

Reflection

This assignment has been a great way to connect across departments and colleges in Northeastern University. Both members of the group work in different colleges, and this program was identified as common across the work we both do, and focused on a student-facing, academic program—which is what we are both passionate about.

Identifying direct measures was more challenging than we anticipated, as we had initially assumed that TRACE evaluations would be accessible for this course and were surprised to learn that they were not used. We needed to adapt to create our own version of this that would be applicable and appropriate for the program as well as addressing our evaluation questions.

Overall, we have both come away with a deeper understanding of the Dialogues of Civilization program, and we were able to explore and identify the differences and similarities of the programs each of our colleges offers. In addition, we were able to identify the strengths and areas for improvement in terms of availability of information provided by the university about the learning outcomes and assessment data for these programs which we will both be able to bring back to our work on these programs in our departments.

References

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Appendix A

Three tools were used to prepare this evaluation plan. Tool 1 already existed, but Tools 2 and 3 were created specifically for this program.

Tool 1: Existing online form collected by Global Experience Office via the GEO website

“Tell us your global story! Please share with us how your global experience through Northeastern University has impacted you. Has this experience changed or inspired your educational or career path? Did you overcome challenges or obstacles? What insights did you gain? Would you recommend this program to another Northeastern student? The Global Experience team will select stories to be published. We can’t wait to hear from you” (Northeastern University Global Experience, n.d.-c)!

This form asks for name, email address, the dialogue a student attended and in what year, and asks for students to describe their experiences.

Tool 2: Post-program Survey:

Questions:

- 1) What year are you in your studies? A first year, second year, etc.
- 2) What is your major and minor (if applicable)?
- 3) Which DOC did you attend?
- 4) Would you recommend this program to another Northeastern student? (Northeastern University Global Experience, n.d.-c) (Yes/No)
- 5) Is this the way you are fulfilling your experiential requirement? (Yes/No)
- 6) Are you completing an additional experiential program?

Please respond to the following questions by providing a rating on a scale of 0 (Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

- 7) Required and additional program materials were helpful in achieving course outcomes (TRACE, 2023)
- 8) The program was intellectually challenging (TRACE, 2023)
- 9) The process for applying to DOCs was easy, and information was clear on the program website.
- 10) This program helped me build my resume
- 11) I feel this program will help my resume stand out
- 12) I have identified one or more professional contacts as a result of this program
- 13) I have improved my foreign language skills

- 14) As a result of this program, I feel more confident in my ability to interact with a wide range of people
- 15) I have improved self-confidence as a result of this program
- 16) I have increased cultural and global awareness
- 17) This program overall was a worthwhile experience

Tool 3: Focus Groups

- 1 hour session each
- 5 structured open-ended questions plus opportunity for open discussion
- Lead/moderator – member of Global Engagement Office staff

Students

- 3 focus groups of 5-10 students spanning a broad range of DOCs

Questions:

Introductions: name and pronouns, year, major, dialogue attended

- 1) Are you using your DOC to satisfy the experiential requirement of your program, as a more cost-effective alternative to study abroad, or do you have a different motivation?
- 2) What was the most rewarding and the most challenging aspect of this program?
- 3) What is your biggest takeaway from your dialogue, both personally and professionally?
- 4) Is there anything you would have done differently? Do you feel like you missed anything?
- 5) Do you feel a dialogue alone is sufficient experience to fulfill the experiential requirement?

Program Assistants

- 1 focus group of 5-10 program assistants spanning a broad range of DOCs

Questions:

Introductions: name and pronouns, year, major, dialogue

- 1) What was your motivation for joining this program as a program assistant?
- 2) What were your expectations and goals for this role? Did this program meet them?
- 3) What was your experience working with a faculty member as a supervisor?
- 4) What is your biggest takeaway from your dialogue, both personally and professionally?
- 5) What was the most rewarding and the most challenging aspect of working on this program?

Faculty

- 1 focus group of 5-10 faculty members spanning a broad range of DOCs

Questions:

Introductions: name and pronouns, year, department, dialogue

- 1) What is your biggest takeaway from your dialogue, both personally and professionally?
- 2) What were your expectations and goals for leading this dialogue? Did this program meet them?
- 3) What was the most rewarding and the most challenging aspect of planning and delivering this program?
- 4) Is there anything you would have done differently? Do you feel like you missed anything?
- 5) Do you feel your students achieved the outcomes you planned for them to?