

# Studying Abroad

## Objectives

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1. Explore reasons to pursue studying abroad.
2. Obtain information regarding how to study abroad.
3. Learn how to prepare for studying abroad.

## Why Study Abroad?

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For many people, studying in a foreign country can be very rewarding. Experiencing another culture may help you grow personally and develop options for your future. Many students report a higher interest in international events, improved academic performance, and increased self-confidence following a study abroad experience. Study abroad options include:

- Attending a U.S. university study program
- Participating in a U.S. organization's program
- Attending an "American" college located in a foreign country
- Attending a foreign university

Like any decision, the decision to study abroad requires considerable thought. To help determine if it would be a good option for you, some issues which warrant consideration are listed below.

## Should I go Independently or College-Sponsored?

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### Independent Study Abroad

Arranging to study abroad independently gives you considerable freedom in creating and fine-tuning your experience. If you are highly motivated, have good academic and foreign language skills, and/or have international contacts, attending classes at a foreign university and living in that culture can be quite rewarding. The important aspect to remember about studying independently abroad is that **you must take complete responsibility for all arrangements**, a substantial task that needs to begin well in advance of your actual travel.

If you plan to study abroad, particularly if your plans include independent study, start at least one year in advance of your projected departure and consider the following:

- Will my credits transfer back to FSU (or another university I attend)?
- Where will I study?

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- Do I need my credits to transfer to FSU or is the experience valuable without credit (or possibly delaying my graduation)?
- To which countries are my language skills, finances, and cultural/academic interests suited?
- What will I study?
- How will my interests, major, language skills, and career choice affect my course selection?
- How is the culture different than my own, and how will I come to understand it?
- How do these countries respond to foreign visitors, specifically Americans?
- What kinds of documents, permits, visas, and healthcare support do I need to arrange?
- Do I want to work to offset the cost of my experience? If so, will I need a work permit? Is it feasible to work and maintain my academics in a different educational system?
- Will I travel alone or with others?
- What are my social and relationship needs, and how will I meet them in this new environment?
- Do my thoughts about finances include transportation to and from the country (e.g., airfare), transportation within the country, tuition, books and supplies, documentation/passport/permit fees, food and living costs, differences in the exchange rate, climatic differences, and possible emergencies? Do I need insurance?

These questions provide some very specific areas to consider when preparing to study and travel abroad. The listings at the end of this guide provide additional resources that will help answer these questions and supply other topics to consider.

## **College-Sponsored Study Abroad**

Going on a college-sponsored program relieves you of many of the technical problems that studying abroad can entail. Some programs offer instruction in English at centers maintained by the U.S. institution, i.e., the Florence and London Study Abroad programs offered by FSU. Other programs enroll students in classes at foreign universities. Housing is usually arranged by the sponsoring institution. You will have the security of English-speaking friends and advisors and transfer of credits is more easily arranged. These programs can make your experience of living in a different culture much easier.

## **How Long Do I Want to Study Abroad?**

One of the most important questions you must ask yourself is how long you wish to be in a foreign country. College-sponsored programs vary in length from short summer courses to a full academic-year. Independently arranged study can last as long as you wish. It would be advisable for you to assess how long you feel you need to be abroad to meet the goals of your experience. Other factors to consider include your level of personal maturity and tendency to become homesick.

If you decide to go abroad, the season, as well as the length of your stay, should be considered. In summer or more temperate seasons, you will be more likely to run into tourists and less likely to experience the feeling of living like a native in your host country. Pay particular attention to the seasons; countries have vastly different climates and varying times when tourists seek to visit. If you are planning a very short stay, you may not want to invest in a railpass or other travel pass—your time for travel away from your study center may be too limited to make a “pass” worthwhile.

## **How Well Do I Need to Know the Language?**

If you are studying independently in a non-English speaking country, you must know the language sufficiently to attend lectures (the teaching format of many universities here and abroad), take notes, and take exams in that language. This often requires near-native fluency. You may have to pass a language fluency test before you are allowed to enroll. Many countries have language institutes to prepare foreign students for their educational work. Some countries take a dim view of visitors who fail to learn the

native language, who expect that English will be spoken, or who think that others will automatically help them because they do not know the native language.

If you study with a college-sponsored program, the degree of fluency needed will depend, in part, on whether or not your classwork is in English. Remember, even if your classes are in English, you will have to deal with many non-English speaking persons in your daily life abroad. The greater your ability to relate to them, the more you may derive from your experience. Part of the excitement of studying abroad is in learning the language of your host country and meeting its people. While it is true that English is a second language to many, it is courteous to speak to people in their native language. You will find that you are usually rewarded by their genuine appreciation of your effort and by their assistance in helping you develop your language skills.

## **How Do I Behave in a Foreign Culture?**

Being immersed in a foreign country with different cultural norms can be exciting, stimulating, and perhaps frightening. People cope with this in differing ways. Americans, in general, are sometimes viewed as “Ameri-centric” by members of other countries. In essence, Americans sometimes act as if things that differ from American norms and values are wrong, immoral, weird, etc. It will make your experience more valuable if you attempt to experience the foreign culture and its people with an open mind. Acting as if other cultural norms are “wrong” or “strange” will not only take away from your experience, but it may offend others who are a part of that culture.

## **Will My Credits and Financial Aid Transfer?**

If you attend a college-sponsored program, including one from your own institution, you should check well in advance to find out if your credits will be accepted. You should also be prepared for possible delays in getting your credits processed, even if they are accepted. In all cases, you should discuss the issue of your credits before you leave the U.S. See your faculty advisor, the coordinator of your study abroad program, and/or your Dean. In some cases you may need to have documentation of course content so that your institution may determine if it

will give you credit for courses taken, and if so, how much. Some schools may require prior approval to authorize the transfer of credits before you leave the U.S. to attend the program. You may need to know in advance what supporting papers are required so that arrangements can be made while you are enrolled abroad and before you return home.

Dealing with foreign universities via overseas mail can be challenging and can potentially disrupt your timetable for graduation when you return to the U.S.

The financial aid you receive from your home institution may be able to be used during your study abroad experience. If you attend a program with your home school, you will likely be able to use state and federal aid. If attending a program with another university, you may be required to get a written agreement between your home school and study abroad university.

### **Where Can I Learn about FSU Programs?**

For information on FSU Study Abroad programs, contact the Office of International Programs, located at A5500 University Center, or visit their website at [www.international.fsu.edu](http://www.international.fsu.edu). FSU programs taught at foreign universities are offered for the summer, fall, and spring semesters at the following sites:

- Florence, Italy
- London, England
- Panama City, Republic of Panama
- Valencia, Spain

The following FSU programs are also available. Check with the Office of International Programs for specific dates:

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|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Buenos Aires, Argentina   | • Leysin, Switzerland      |
| • Florianópolis, Brazil     | • Moscow, Russia           |
| • Dubrovnik, Croatia        | • Paris, France            |
| • Durban, South Africa      | • Prague, Czech Republic   |
| • Eleuthera/Bimini, Bahamas | • San Jose, Costa Rica     |
| • Istanbul, Turkey          | • Sydney/Cairns, Australia |
| • Iquitos, Peru             | • Tianjin, China           |
| • Kibbutz Tzuba, Israel     | • Tiputini, Ecuador        |

### **Study Abroad Checklist**

- Identify reasons you want to go abroad.
- Discuss your plans with a study abroad representative and your academic advisor.
- Discuss the program with recent alumni.
- Before you go, obtain a written agreement concerning academic credit from an appropriate official with the foreign organization or college you want to attend.
- Increase your knowledge of the host country and its language through courses, individual reading, and discussion with professors and others who have been there. Write to its embassy for additional information.
- Increase your knowledge of U.S. history, geography, government and cultures, so that you will be able to answer questions while abroad.
- Apply for a passport and any visas that may be required.
- Make transportation arrangements well in advance of your intended departure.
- Have a physical and a dental checkup, and obtain any special vaccinations which may be advised by your physician. Bring extra supplies of medications, contacts, etc. Request a copy of your medical history record to keep with you overseas.
- Be sure you have insurance that covers you for international travel and during your stay abroad.
- Purchase traveler's checks and/or obtain an international credit card or letters of credit.
- Obtain an international student I.D. card.
- Before leaving home, make arrangements to receive housing, financial aid, and preregistration materials for your first term back at your home institution.
- Check climate information to determine what clothing you will need to pack.

## Where Can I Learn about Other Programs?

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Visit the library in the Office of International Programs (A5500 University Center) to obtain information on other schools that offer study abroad programs. Remember to check to see whether the other programs offer credits that can be transferred back to FSU. You may also consult resources available in The Career Center, listed in this guide.

## Additional Resources

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### Select Career Center Library Resources

<i>The ISS Directory of International Schools 2010-2011</i> .....	VIC I65
<i>Vacation Study Abroad</i> .....	IIIE C6
<i>Academic Year Abroad</i> .....	IIIE C62
<i>It's Your World: Student's Guide to Education Abroad</i> .....	IIIE H6
<i>Peterson's Study Abroad 2008</i> .....	IIIE P4
<i>The Global Classroom</i> .....	IIIE L3
<i>Study Abroad: How to Get the Most Out of Your Experience</i> .....	IIIE D6
<i>Study Abroad 101</i> .....	IIIE W4
<i>(Study Abroad Programs) Careering Abroad and Crossculturally Overseas Programs (by country)</i> .....	Module 14
<i>Florida State University Study Abroad File</i> .....	Section III

### Select Online Resources

- CIEE — [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org)
- GoAbroad.com — [www.goabroad.com/study-abroad](http://www.goabroad.com/study-abroad)
- IIEPassport.org — [www.iiepassport.org](http://www.iiepassport.org)
- FSU International Programs — [www.international.fsu.edu](http://www.international.fsu.edu)
- NRCSA — [www.nrca.com](http://www.nrca.com)
- StudyAbroad.com — [www.studyabroad.com](http://www.studyabroad.com)
- TransitionsAbroad.com — [www.transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com)

## Summary

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Studying abroad can be an exciting and meaningful experience that enriches your personal and professional development. Careful planning is essential to ensuring that you make the most of your study abroad experience. Visit the FSU Office of International Programs for more information on studying abroad and come to The Career Center upon your return for help leveraging your international experiences!

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