



CAREER VISION

See the World Through Study Abroad

Quickly...answer this million-dollar (or perhaps “million-euro”) question: “*Are you planning to study abroad as part of your college experience?*”

What’s your answer? Do any of the following responses sound like yours? “*Bien sûr, claro, oczywiście, självklart,*” or simply...“*Of course!*”

Before you go digging through your closet for that duffle bag you haven’t even seen since spring break of your senior year in high school...or you say “cheese” while the photographer snaps your passport picture...here are some things you’ll need to know.

What Is “Study Abroad”? Through a study abroad program, you take classes in a foreign country while you are still enrolled at your college. Programs range in length from three weeks (usually over the summer) to a full academic year. Most study abroad programs, however, run for a single semester.

Types of Programs

There are several different types of study abroad programs, which are commonly classified by the program’s sponsor:

- *U.S. College/University.* Led by your home college/university, another U.S. college, or by a consortium of schools that have study centers and/or international branch campuses, these programs are designed to enable you to study in a foreign environment under the traditional U.S. academic framework.
- *Host University.* Many U.S. schools have partnerships with foreign universities that permit you to enroll in their classes as a visiting student. You take courses alongside local students at the host school. Since these classes are usually taught in the native language spoken in the host country, program sponsors sometimes provide tutoring assistance. (Hybrid programs allow students to take some of their courses at the host school and others at a U.S. study center/international branch campus.)
- *Third Party Providers.* Run by for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, these providers have affiliation agreements with U.S. colleges.

Many colleges offer multiple study abroad programs from each of the three categories described above. Ask a representative in your school’s Office of International Programs



for specific details regarding your options. Carefully weigh the pros and cons of each alternative to choose the one that is best for you.

Benefits of Studying Abroad

Overwhelmingly, students who have studied abroad say it was a rewarding, life-changing experience. They returned home ready to approach their remaining college studies with renewed energy and a broadened world view.

Other benefits of the study abroad experience include:

- Enhanced awareness of the values and way of life in our own country, your place in our nation, and its place in the world.
- Increased maturity, adaptability, self-insight, self-reliance, and self-confidence.
- Deeper understanding of other cultures.
- Improved foreign language skills.
- Broadened perspective on issues; increased understanding and acceptance of diverse viewpoints that differ from your own.
- Unique and amazing opportunities...to make new friends; to make connections and build a network that is truly global; to travel; to take new courses not offered by your college.

Last, but certainly not least, you can gain a competitive edge over students who never venture abroad to study. The challenges shared by societies are global and interdisciplinary, as are the potential solutions. Therefore, most employers place high value on your study abroad experience. Some seek out candidates with specific language skills, expansive cultural awareness and extensive interactions with people from other parts of the world. So, your study abroad experience can open up a world of opportunities to you – working overseas or as part of a cross-cultural, global team.

Drawbacks of Studying Abroad

Drawbacks? What's not to like about all this, you ask? It all sounds pretty great so far! But, as with most things in life, there are some downsides. For instance, here's one that deserves special attention – potential academic transfer issues. In some cases, study abroad credits do not transfer to your school and/or major, slowing down your progress toward graduating on time.



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Other drawbacks of the study abroad experience include:

- *Cost.* Tuition, fees and housing costs for study abroad programs may be higher than you are paying now. At the same time, the value of the dollar compared to foreign currency is in constant flux. Couple that with the fact that the cost of living in your host country may be higher than it is stateside, and it can be difficult to compare the true costs of study abroad programs. Another cost to consider – you’ll probably want to do some weekend traveling while you study abroad, visiting other cities or even other countries. That means you’ll need more funds for transportation and housing. Staying at hostels can be a good way to keep costs down.
- *Academic challenges.* It’s not always easy to study in a completely different environment, particularly if your classes are taught in another language.
- *Culture shock.* For some, the study abroad experience may feel overwhelming. It takes time to acclimate to a new culture, new food, new styles of instruction, and (maybe) even to a new language.
- *Separation.* It’s hard to be away from your family and friends for an extended period of time. (But, on the bright side, technology helps! You can keep in touch through social media, email, Skype™, and some reasonably-affordable international cell phone minutes.)
- *Interruption issues.* If you are heavily involved in athletics and/or community and student organizations, or if you hold a job, you may face some tough choices as you reflect on your commitment level to these activities.
- *Safety risks.* While these instances are extremely rare, you can face safety and health issues while studying abroad. Be sure you know how your study abroad provider guards your safety in case of an emergency or illness. It’s important that you’re prepared in case the “unexpected” happens.

In addition, some employers may not view your study abroad experience in a favorable light. For example, if you go to an upper-tier university, employers may be concerned that the classes you took while studying abroad were not of the same academic rigor. No matter what school you attend, some employers worry that you may have missed out on some important aspects of your college program by studying in a foreign country. Finally, some employers have the perception that study abroad is more about the travel and new experiences than it is about the learning.



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Is a Study Abroad Program Right for You?

While study abroad has both pros and cons, keep in mind that most students who have done it say it was an experience of a lifetime. Yet, it's not for everyone. Carefully consider your level of adaptability and whether the various study abroad programs match your needs, interests and goals. Talk to others who have studied abroad; they can give you a realistic picture of what to expect. Meet with a representative from your college's Office of International Programs to gain a thorough understanding of your options and their fit for you. Be sure to start your planning at least one year in advance of your study abroad experience.

After all that, if you've decided that study abroad is right for you, then dust off that duffle bag and get ready for an exciting new adventure!

Bon voyage, buen viaje, niezły wypad, bra resa. In other words, have a good trip!