

Find the right option to study abroad

As the world becomes a smaller place, students are now more aware than ever of the need to have an international educational experience. In 2007, approximately 206,000 students studied abroad, and this number is projected to grow to 1 million by 2017. As part of the college experience, study abroad increasingly comes into play.

Students should be educated on the terminology and ramifications of choosing various options to study abroad. There are two basic types of study abroad programs: those tied to specific colleges and universities providing credit, which counts toward a specific degree, and those offered through independent study abroad organizations, which may or may not provide direct college credit. Two examples of independent organizations are American Institute for Foreign Study, (aifsabroad.com) and International Studies Abroad, (studiesabroad.com). Founded in 1964, AIFS provides summer, semester and academic year college study abroad programs. Every year nearly 5000 U.S. undergraduates choose to study with AIFS at one of 24 international campus locations. ISA, founded in 1988, offers a wide variety of study abroad programs at accredited schools and universities in 13 different countries. Both AIFS and ISA cater to high school students and, since they are independent organizations, a participant does not have to be currently enrolled in a US college or university to study abroad. Both have programs that count toward college credit, although not all colleges and universities accept these credits.

Most US colleges and universities have an organized study abroad program of some sort. Some colleges, such as Butler University in Indianapolis are especially known for well-organized and extensive programs. Butler University offers over 110 study abroad programs in over 40 countries for its own students through the Center for Global Education and for students coming from other universities through the Institute for Study Abroad—Butler University. A program like IFSA-Butler will process all paperwork, arrange housing, and make tuition and housing payments on the student's behalf. Pre-enrollment advising is provided to help find the best university match and, at the end of the program, an official transcript is provided with U.S. grade and credit equivalents.

Some colleges have their own satellite programs in foreign countries which are only open to currently enrolled students. The advantage and disadvantage of this type of study abroad is that a student would travel with and study with professors and students that would come from their home university. This is an example of an "island" program where a student lives and studies with other American students in curriculum designed especially for American students. Another study abroad option is an "integrated" program where a student studies with a host university where the students may be native to that country or come from other diverse locations.

In general, there are several issues that students should consider in making a study abroad decision.

- Should they enroll in a program connected to their own university, use another school's program or a program offered by an independent organization?
- Will credits transfer to their home college and will grades achieved through a study abroad program be included in their GPA at their home school?
- Is the program an integrated or an island program and does the program have an on-site office?
- What services are included in the program fee?
- Is financial aid available?

Ellen Shapira, a JFVS college and educational consultant with several years experience, can be reached at 502 452 6341 or ellens@jivs.com.

Article prepared by:

Ellen Shapira

*College and Educational Consultant
Jewish Family and Vocational Service (JFVS)*

*Louisville, Kentucky
(502) 452-6341 ext. 225
ellens@jivs.com*