

FINDING A QUALITY PROGRAM FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Prior to participating in an international education experience, SMCM recommends that students and their parents research the different programs available for study abroad. One of the main reasons students give for not studying abroad is that they start the planning process too late and miss the opportunity. The earlier you start researching programs, the better chance you will have to study abroad, include the coursework in your on-campus degree program, and graduate on-time. The simplest way to find an appropriate study abroad program is to look at programs available through your home campus; home campus faculty and staff can help you through the process.

Tools for Finding a Program:

- **U.S. Home Campus International Education Office/IE Resource Library:** The first place to look for a study abroad program is SMCM's Office of International Education. The staff can familiarize you with SMCM programs and the process of selecting a program, applying, participating, and returning home.
- **Web Sites:** There are a number of websites with information about available international education programs. Some websites we recommend are: Studyabroad.com, Goabroad.com, IIEPassport, and Peterson's.
- **Reference Books:** The following are comprehensive reference books which are updated each year: **Peterson's Study Abroad**, **Peterson's Summer Study Abroad**, **IIE Academic Year Abroad**, and **IIE Short-Term Study Abroad**. They include detailed explanations and descriptions of many study abroad programs.

Basic Information on Finding a Program:

The following is a list of issues to consider and questions to ask when looking for an appropriate international education experience. Along with speaking with program administrators in the U.S., it is suggested that you ask to speak to students who participated in the program in the past. If possible, speak directly with one of the program administrators abroad to find out both the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

- **Courses Available:** What courses can be taken abroad? Will they be taught by U.S. home campus professors or foreign university faculty or local nationals? Do the professors have Ph.D.s, Master's Degrees, Bachelor's Degrees? Have they taught U.S. students? Is the set-up traditional classroom or experiential learning?
- **Transfer Credit:** It is important to know how courses taken abroad will count toward the U.S. degree program (major, minor, language, general education, etc.).
- **Housing:** Is housing provided as part of the program? Is it in an international university residence hall? With a family/homestay? In an apartment? What part of the city is it located? How far is housing located from the classrooms? Is housing located near public transportation?
- **Cost:** What are the costs of the program? Do they include tuition, administrative fees, room and board, international travel, in-country travel and excursions, additional costs?
- **Where?:** What country/region/city do you want to study in? Where in the city are the program office/courses located? Is it in a modern city, a rural location, or a developing area with limited resources?
- **How Long?:** Is the program available for a year, semester, quarter, summer, short-term?
- **When?:** Will a program session be offered when you are planning to go or when you are available to participate? How will the season and schedule abroad compare to that at your home campus?
- **Language:** Do you want to study in a country where the language is not English? How much language training should you have before going? What type of language training is offered abroad? Are courses offered in both English and the other country's language?
- **Support Services:** Does your U.S. home campus provide academic advising and counseling to students through program orientations (some campuses require that all students take a semester-long course before studying abroad)? What types of support services and administrative offices are in place abroad?
- **Who's in Charge of Safety?:** Is there someone at the U.S. office and abroad who is specifically responsible for students' health and safety? What policies and procedures do they have in place? Is there a resident director for the program?
- **Program Evaluations:** Quality programs will take part in regular evaluations of their programs and include feedback from staff, faculty, and students. Ask if you can see these evaluations.

WHO RUNS YOUR PROGRAM?

There are five general types of study abroad program sponsors, which can be classified by the kind of relationship your U.S. home institution's staff has with a program's international staff. Programs can be home university owned and operated, home university partnerships, independent student, individual faculty/staff travel study, or hybrid. Before deciding on a study abroad program, try to identify what kind of relationship your U.S. college or university has with each program.

Five Types of Program Sponsors:

1. **Home University Owned and Operated:** The U.S. college or university usually operates facilities and programs abroad as if they were extensions of its U.S. campus. It employs some or all of a program's academic/administrative staff abroad and owns, leases, controls or operates some or all of the program facilities and operations abroad. Staff and facilities abroad vary greatly from a one person office to a comprehensive campus.
2. **Home University Partnerships:** The study abroad program is a result of a cooperative arrangement or agreement between the U.S. college or university and one or more educational institutions or organizations abroad. This allows a U.S. university to send its students on programs owned and operated by an American or a foreign college, university or independent program provider.
3. **Independent Student:** Students find and enroll in programs independent of their university. In some cases, students will remain enrolled in their home campus, using their financial aid. In other cases, students will be required to take a leave of absence. Upon return, students may or may not receive credit for study completed abroad.
4. **Individual Faculty/Staff Travel Study Program:** Many short term/summer programs are led by an individual faculty or staff member accompanying the group, with no permanent office abroad.
5. **Hybrid Programs:** Many study abroad programs are mixtures of the four previously mentioned types of programs. For example, your home university may have an administrative office abroad, while courses and housing may be offered by a foreign university, and excursions may be arranged by an independent program provider.

Four Types of On-Site Program Providers:

The program sponsors listed above, may provide on-site program administration through four types of program providers:

1. **Foreign University Programs:** Students directly enroll in the courses offered by the foreign university. Foreign universities offer varying levels of services and support.
2. **U.S. University Abroad:** Students can enroll in other U.S. universities' programs abroad with which their home university has a formal agreement.
3. **Independent Program Providers:** Many study abroad providers are neither colleges nor universities, but are solely in the business of providing study abroad programs. Programs vary from well-staffed organization with offices in the U.S. and abroad to a one person office anywhere in the world.
4. **Hybrid Program Providers:** Many study abroad program providers are mixtures of the three previously mentioned types of program providers. For instance, your U.S. university may have an administrative office abroad, while courses and housing may be offered by a foreign university, and excursions may be arranged by an independent program provider.

After you understand who runs your program and whether it is closely connected with your U.S. home university, the next step should involve a review of whether the level of support services both in the U.S. and abroad will meet your needs. Remember that there is no national organization which regulates the quality and certifies any minimum standard for study abroad programs. For this reason, it would be wise to take an active role in evaluating a program prior to participating in it. It is important to look at the many types of activities provided by your program.

Activities Include:

- Excursions/Field Trips
- Travel/Transportation
- Classes
- Housing (problems with host families, living arrangement set-up, getting an apartment)
- Counseling (if provided)/Student Services/Health Office
- Academic Advisement for classes