**Studying Abroad: Getting Started**

**Getting Started**

*Deciding if, where, when and how to study abroad is easier than you may think!*

With so many study abroad program types and destinations available to you, and the long check list of tasks you need to complete before actually heading overseas, it can be difficult to decide where to start. Get yourself organized with these five steps that will help you plan ahead for your time abroad.

**1. Decide if study abroad is right for you**

Sure studying abroad *sounds* awesome, but is it a good fit for you? First, ask yourself a few questions:

* Do I like traveling to unfamiliar places?
* Am I comfortable being away from family and friends for an extend period of time?
* Would I enjoy exploring a new culture?
* Will I use study abroad to help shape me academically, professionally and/or personally?

If you answer “yes” to most or all of the questions, study abroad is probably a great choice for you. If you answer “no” to a lot of the questions, it might be time to do more honest soul searching before you decide. The reality is, studying abroad is a unique, adventurous opportunity to try something new and grow as both a student and a person, and it also comes with some challenges such as being out of your comfort zone and away from family and friends.

**2. Decide where and when to study abroad**

There are so many destinations to choose from when deciding where you want to study abroad that it can often be an overwhelming choice. It might be best if you first narrow down the type of location that interests you the most, and then make your decision. For example:

* Would you prefer to study abroad in a rural or urban setting?
* Do you want to be in an English-speaking area or somewhere where you need to speak a foreign language?
* Is it important to you that you be centrally located to spend time on weekends traveling to nearby cities?

Based on your answers, you probably have a good idea about the qualities you want in your study abroad destination. Now it’s just a matter of finding it! To help you find your perfect destination, you can [browse by country](http://www.studyabroad.com/countries.aspx), [browse by city](http://www.studyabroad.com/cities.aspx) or [follow student bloggers](http://www.studyabroad.com/b/default.aspx) to see what it’s like to live in that location.

Next, it’s time to decide when you want to study abroad in your said location. Typically, it’s best to decide when you plan to go abroad at least nine months to one year ahead of time, if not more. Many study abroad programs require applicants to apply at least six months before the program begins, so having at least nine months gives you time to research, find and apply to a program(s) at your leisure.

**3. Find study abroad programs**

Now that you have decided where and when you want to study abroad, it’s time to [find a program](http://www.studyabroad.com/articles/find-a-study-abroad-program.aspx). From summer study abroad trips to semester-long and full academic year programs, there are several types of programs to choose from as you decide which is best for you. As you research your options, it’s important to talk directly with the program(s) of interest to learn more about what they offer, at what cost, and which amenities are or aren’t included such as airport pick-up, onsite orientation, housing, etc.

**4. Talk to your support system**

Meet with your academic advisor to ensure you can stay on track to graduate on time, plan the coursework you need to take before you go abroad, the coursework you should save and take while abroad and the coursework that you will need to take after you return.

Talk with your parents about why, when and where you want to study abroad. Deciding to study abroad is often a family decision, and having an open conversation with them can help both you and them plan the best study abroad trip for you as possible. It’s important to come to the conversation prepared with your points, and be ready with answers to their questions.

For students: Points to discuss with your parents

* International experience can be a big resume booster once it comes time to job hunt.  Gaining a global perspective in today’s international marketplace is invaluable, and with the opportunity to intern while abroad, students often develop new skills and grow their network of professional contacts.
* Spending time abroad often results in a higher level of maturity and personal independence.  Students often learn a lot about themselves and what they’re capable of by living in a foreign environment.
* Study abroad is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.  Period.  You can visit another country any time in life, but to live abroad is a unique opportunity that doesn’t normally lend itself to non-students.
* Immersion is a great way to learn or improve at a foreign language.

 For parents: Questions to ask your child

* What program(s) are you looking at?  After conducting some online research or talking to an advisor, does it seem like students in the past have had good experiences with that program?
* Is the country/city you’re considering a safe place to live?  What is the crime rate of the location?  What should we know about the health system?
* What sort of housing is available to you?  Will you be on your own to find an apartment, or will your program take care of it for you?  Are you interested in a home-stay (living with a local family) or would you prefer a dorm setting?  What are your options and how much do they cost?
* What is the exchange rate, and what is the average cost-of-living?  How much do you plan to spend on travel, souvenirs, etc.?  Are there scholarships available?  In the end, is it a program and/or destination you/we can afford?

 As you and your family discuss your plans, continue to keep in touch with your academic advisor throughout the planning and application process. 

Not sure what to do next?  Read [Accepted, now what?](http://www.studyabroad.com/b/study_abroad_news/archive/2012/09/17/getting-started-series-accepted-now-what.aspx)

**5. Put study abroad finances in place**

Funding study abroad is often a concern of many students and parents; however it doesn’t need to break the bank. In fact, [many students can apply their current financial aid packages toward their study abroad programs](http://www.studyabroad.com/articles/federal-financial-aid-options-for-study-abroad.aspx). For some students who pay out-of-state-tuition, studying abroad may actually be cheaper than a traditional on-campus semester. Plus, there are a variety of [scholarship opportunities](http://www.studyabroad.com/scholarships.aspx) available too. When choosing your funding options, it’s important to remember to start early, ask for help and seek multiple resources.

Once you have your finances in place for your program tuition, it’s time to start saving and budgeting for your overseas daily living expenses. As you plan your budget, prioritize what is worth spending money on and what isn’t. For example, if you can’t afford everything on your wish list, would you rather buy an array of souvenirs and splurge on meals or would you rather take a few weekend trips to nearby cities? There are plenty of[money saving tips](http://www.studyabroad.com/articles/studying-abroad-and-saving-money.aspx) that can help you keep costs down while you’re abroad.

Read more: <http://www.studyabroad.com/articles/studying-abroad-getting-started.aspx#ixzz3M88W35MK>