

STUDY ABROAD FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: A Guide for Education Abroad Professionals



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What does an education abroad professional need to know about working with international students who wish to study abroad?

Many universities have dual goals to increase international enrollments as well as expand education abroad. When campuses are successful with both, international students seek education abroad opportunities. The concept of “advising” students has a different construct in an education abroad office than in an international student office, where regulatory issues predominate. Education abroad professionals, wisely, have no desire to become experts in regulatory issues; however, success with international students for education abroad does require an appreciation for these complex issues. This resource provides a framework to consider, collaborate, and communicate with the international student and scholar services (ISSS) office for advising international students who wish to study abroad as a component of a U.S.-based education.

This guide was developed by Lynn Aguado (Michigan State University) and Meg Richmond (National Institutes of Health) to support the NAFSA webinar [Advising International Students on Education Abroad](#). This webinar is now available on demand from NAFSA. For details, see http://www.nafsa.org/Attend_Events/Online/Webinars/On-Demand_Webinars/.

DEFINITIONS FOR THIS GUIDE

- 🌐 **International Student** – A student studying at a U.S. university who is not a U.S. citizen. This usually focuses on students whose visas are sponsored by the universities where they study, generally F-1 and J-1 students, and whose universities have a federally mandated reporting requirement.
- 🌐 **U.S. Permanent Resident** – A student studying at a U.S. university or college who has been granted lawful permanent residence (often referred to as a “green card”) by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Permanent residents are not U.S. citizens, and they continue to retain their non-U.S. citizenship.
- 🌐 **Study Abroad** – Any study outside the United States formally recognized by the student’s home university, especially credit-bearing classes.

BACKGROUND

- 📖 The *2013 Open Doors* report from the Institute of International Education (IIE) reported that there were nearly 820,000 international students studying in the United States during 2012–2013, an increase of nearly 10 percent from the previous year.

📖 As enrollment of international students rises, especially in undergraduate programs, there is an increased number of these students who seek to study “abroad.” There is only limited or anecdotal data on international students who study abroad, as *Open Doors* does not include international students in the study abroad inventory.

📖 In 2013, the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), a consortium of Big 10 and other like universities, began a benchmarking project that will include tracking of international student participation in study abroad. More on the CIC project is available at http://www.nafsa.org/Explore_International_Education/Trends/TI/Finally,_Some_Movement_in_Counting_Education_Abroad.

CONSIDERATIONS

What issues/factors influence an international student’s experience with study abroad?

CONSIDERATION ISSUE #1: **CITIZENSHIP**

Even if the student is a U.S. permanent resident, his/her citizenship may have an effect on your advising:

- ▶ What is the student’s citizenship? How do you find out?
- ▶ How can the university assist the student in acquiring the proper visa for the study abroad experience?
- ▶ Consider: there may be differences in visa requirements for citizens of countries other than the United States, even if the student is a U.S. permanent resident. Do not assume that entry requirements will be similar for all your students going abroad.
- ▶ What are the responsibilities of your office? How involved should your office be in advising non-U.S. citizens on obtaining visas for study abroad? If not you, then who?
- ▶ How do your education abroad advising or application processes and forms encourage early identification of non-U.S. citizenship?

CONSIDERATION ISSUE #2: **U.S. VISA STATUS**

The international student’s visa status will determine obligations the student has to his/her educational institution regarding any immigration requirements, and it also will help shape the advice given by the international student/scholar services (ISSS) department.

- ▶ What is the student’s current U.S. immigration status?
- ▶ What limitations and requirements will impact the student’s successful study?
- ▶ How can the university assist the student in returning to the United States after study abroad?

CONSIDERATION ISSUE #3: U.S. VISA TYPE

The student's visa type determines his/her primary purpose in the United States.

- ▶ Is the student an F-1/J-1 student? Consider: An F-1 or J-1 student is required to enroll in a "full course of study" every semester to maintain status, and may drop below full-time enrollment only in very specific situations after receiving approval from the Designated School Official (DSO) or Responsible Officer (RO) at the ISSS office.

Factors that should be considered with the ISSS:

Three factors listed below should be thoroughly discussed by the study abroad adviser and the student with the F-1 student's DSO or a J-1 student's RO. The immigration rules regarding travel, reentry, and maintenance of status are complex, and *should be handled only by school officials who are well versed in those intricacies*. Failing to adequately address U.S. immigration issues before plans are made to study abroad can result in the student experiencing difficulties reentering the United States to resume studies or in obtaining future immigration benefits.

1. While the student is studying abroad, will the student's SEVIS record be maintained in active status, or will the record be "terminated" or otherwise ended?
2. Will the student need a new U.S. visa in order to reenter the United States to resume study? If so, where should the student apply, what kind of documentation will he or she need, how long will it take, and what are the risks of the student not getting a visa to return to the United States?
3. Some benefits such as employment authorization require a student to be in status for a particular amount of time before being eligible for the benefit: will the absence outside the United States impact the student's eligibility for such benefits?

Options for International Students on Other U.S. Visa Statuses (other than F or J)

Other international students (e.g., H, G, dependent visa holders) may also wish to study abroad. In general, international student advisers should refer these students to their program sponsors or immigration attorneys for specific advice on their particular visa statuses. In some cases, students may be interested in reentering the United States in a new immigration classification after their periods of study abroad (e.g., H-4 "aging out" of the status).

Under specific circumstances, the student can use the study abroad period as a "convenient" way to acquire an appropriate immigration status upon return. Be sure to advise on time constraints on reentry, etc.

CONSIDERATION ISSUE #4: **DURATION OF THE PROGRAM**

Regulatory language for F-1/J-1 students indicates that the student should not be absent from the United States for more than five months. Additionally, students also need to maintain the full-time status registration requirement for institutions during required semesters. This impacts whether an international student can maintain a visa status while participating in a study abroad program.

- ▶ Does your institution have a policy that determines whether the student's status is maintained while s/he is abroad or if that status must be terminated?
- ▶ Are policies consistent across J-1 and F-1 immigration statuses?
- ▶ What level of oversight does the ISSS office intend to commit to international students who study abroad?
- ▶ How does study abroad impact a student's participation in future Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Shorter programs that take place during nonrequired semesters (summer semester, "January Term"/"minimester") require less involvement on the part of the ISSS office than longer (semester- or year-length) programs. On the other hand, these shorter programs can pose more of an issue to the education abroad (EA) office due to the possible additional visa requirements for non-U.S. citizens and the short timeline for application.

CONSIDERATION ISSUE #5: **STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM PROVIDER**

The program provider may impact an international student's immigration status and ability to maintain a full course of study.

- ▶ Who will organize the program? Home university, an exchange partner, third-party provider?
- ▶ How is the student's course enrollment fulfilled? Is it different from on-campus enrollment? This is important to know so that someone can verify that the student is enrolled at his/her home institution to meet U.S. immigration requirements.
- ▶ What other offices should be included besides the EA and ISSS offices?

CONSIDERATION ISSUE #6: **DESTINATIONS AND DOCUMENTATION**

A particular destination may impact a student's need and/or ability to acquire a visa to study in that country. International students may have additional requirements for multidestination programs or planned side trips. Additionally, diplomatic relationships between the student's home country and the host country may impede or improve a student's ability to visit that country and acquire the appropriate documentation.

- ▶ Where is the student planning to study?
- ▶ In how many countries will s/he study or visit?

- ▶ What are the entry requirements for each country (including transfers)?
- ▶ Is the host institution likely to accept the student?
- ▶ What is your institution's stance on international students who study in their home countries? Does your office or institution have a policy about this? How does the policy apply to faculty-led or exchange programs?
- ▶ If a study abroad program is required for a major, would you waive restrictions (if any) on home country study?

CONSIDERATION ISSUE #7: **HOST COUNTRY VISA ASSISTANCE**

Each host country imposes its own requirements to acquire a visa. Although an international student may already have a U.S. visa, the EA office cannot assume that the student will be prepared to apply for necessary visas for countries within the chosen study abroad program.

- ▶ Which office should take the lead on providing assistance on host country visas?
- ▶ How much support can you provide international students with as relates to acquiring needed study abroad visas? And what resources do you need in order to do so?
- ▶ What are the administrative and legal considerations to keep in mind when deciding on the level of support you can provide?
- ▶ What documentation will the students need?

CONSIDERATION ISSUE #8: **TIMELINES**

Advance planning is crucial. Many of the administrative processes take weeks and often build upon each other, so if the first step isn't started early enough it may not be possible to complete the rest of the steps in time.

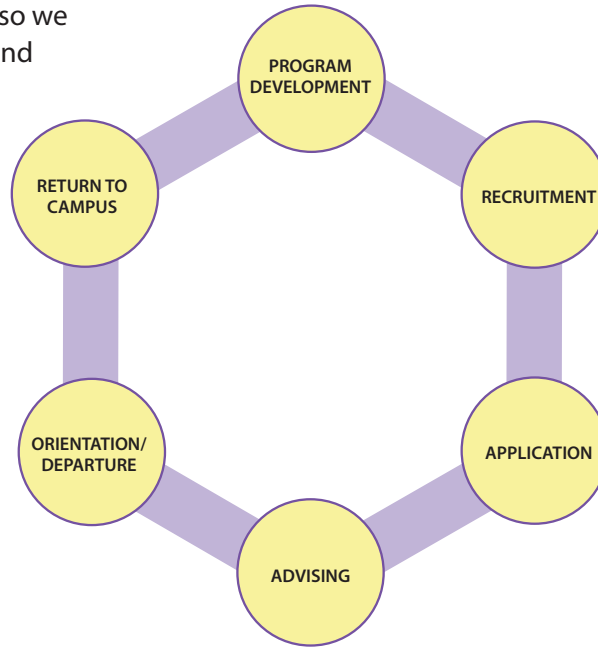
- ▶ How do application deadlines impact international students?
- ▶ How do our EA and ISSS offices inform international students of expectations regarding timelines?

COORDINATION

Is there an established plan for collaborating between education abroad and international student offices to send international students abroad?

How are you currently working together when you identify international students studying abroad?

- ▶ How can we go from reactive to proactive so we can avoid giving students the runaround and get access to the information and advice they need?
- ▶ When do you connect the student with either the EA or ISSS office? It's not enough to just pass them along to the other office when we don't know the answer.
- ▶ What are the critical points where offices can come together to prevent difficulties for the international student?



Who else needs to be involved?

- ▶ Registrar
- ▶ Multicultural student affairs
- ▶ Office of legal counsel
- ▶ Academic advisers
- ▶ Others?

COORDINATION ISSUE #1: PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ What kinds of programs does your institution already have? Are they meeting the needs of your international students?
- ▶ Who develops education abroad programs? The EA office? Academic units? Faculty?
- ▶ Is the program abroad required or optional? What is the effect on international students?
- ▶ Are there opportunities for the ISSS office to weigh in on locations that could create special concerns for international students?

COORDINATION ISSUE #2: **RECRUITMENT**

- ▶ Who does the recruitment for study abroad programs, and how might that be adapted for an international student audience?
- ▶ How does the ISSS office encourage or support international students who take part in study abroad opportunities?
- ▶ What information is shared during recruitment that helps inform international students of responsibilities/timeline for study abroad?
- ▶ How can your EA office build a relationship with the ISSS office to help international students see study abroad as a realistic option?

COORDINATION ISSUE #3: **APPLICATION**

- ▶ How does the application process work for your students and how might you adapt it to assist with your support of international students?
- ▶ How do you determine if a student is “international”? Is it a question on your application form, or do you pull the information from a central database?
- ▶ Do you share these lists with your ISSS office?
- ▶ Can you require students to submit a copy of their passports with their applications?

COORDINATION ISSUE #4: **ADVISING**

- ▶ In the advising process, when do you find out that an international student is interested in study abroad?
- ▶ Whom do you contact when you find out that an international student is interested in study abroad?
- ▶ Does it affect your advising process in any way?
- ▶ Who advises and when?
- ▶ How can the EA adviser ensure that the international student informs and seeks advising from the ISSS adviser? Who sets up the appointment?
- ▶ Does the student need support with:
 - ▶ An expired U.S. visa?
 - ▶ A visa to enter the host country?
 - ▶ Finances to continue both programs?
 - ▶ Deciding on the study abroad program s/he wants to participate in?

COORDINATION ISSUE #5: **ORIENTATION/DEPARTURE**

- ▶ What are your current orientation procedures?
- ▶ What special instructions do you need to provide for international students?
- ▶ How can you integrate these into general orientation?
- ▶ How can you adapt your language to be more inclusive (e.g., not just “you represent the United States” but “you represent your home country”)?
- ▶ How do you work with the program leaders/host institutions/providers to inform them regarding any special needs of international students?
- ▶ How can you work with your ISSS office to assist with your international students at orientation?

COORDINATION ISSUE #6: **RETURN TO CAMPUS**

- ▶ Who communicates with students about reentry procedures? Whom do they contact if they have difficulties?
- ▶ How are returning study abroad students included in reentry activities?

Suggestions for Building Relationships Among Offices

- ▶ Find someone who is interested in the issue.
- ▶ Find out if they have encountered any issues.
- ▶ Talk about challenges with students and study abroad.
- ▶ Try to find out what resources already exist.
- ▶ Talk about how much they want to encourage students to apply—beyond self-selection.
- ▶ Find out the other office’s procedures.

Convincing Stakeholders

- ▶ What are the benefits for stakeholders?
- ▶ Are these students considered part of your diversity of study abroad? If so, this can be a good way to increase funding and support for your initiatives.
- ▶ How can you conform the new initiative to existing cultural norms on your campus?
- ▶ What small immediate gains can be made to improve processes (such as the addition of a visa status question to the study abroad application)?
- ▶ How aware and supportive are campus leaders?
- ▶ How can you support the initiatives of your colleagues beyond this single issue?

COMMUNICATION

How do you know what issues/factors influence a student's experience with study abroad?

ON YOUR WEBSITE

- ▶ Keep forms and websites citizen-neutral (e.g., referencing passports and visas without mentioning United States).
- ▶ Make sure passport and visa information is noncountry specific.
- ▶ Consider adding an information page for international students studying abroad.

Samples:

<http://www.towson.edu/studyabroad/stepstostudyabroad.asp> – Study Abroad Policy and Timeline. International students not specifically mentioned although passport/visa is non-country-specific.

<http://www.towson.edu/isso/stayinghere.asp> – ISSO. Study abroad not explicitly mentioned but information regarding legal status and embassies/consulates/other visas mentioned.

<http://studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/programs/> – Program search page has a link to information for non-U.S. citizens.

http://studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/studenthandbk/pre-dep_planning/visa.html – Visa support page has special guidance for non-U.S. citizens.

<http://studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/whocanstudyabroad/> – Page encourages all students to study abroad, including non-U.S. citizens.

ON YOUR UNIVERSAL FORMS AND GUIDELINES

- ▶ Provide specific support for international students.
- ▶ Adapt existing forms for new uses.
- ▶ Utilize the institution's student information system.
- ▶ Use cc: (to EA or ISSS office) when engaging with an international student studying abroad.
- ▶ Refer U.S. visa questions to the ISSS office.
- ▶ Check for tone friendliness and language.

IN YOUR TIMELINES, OUTREACH, AND MAILINGS

- ▶ Generate lists of international students for e-mail blasts.
- ▶ Invite applicants to information sessions.
- ▶ Consider changing application deadlines to allow for more time.
- ▶ Create country-specific visa guidelines.
- ▶ Develop a corresponding study abroad timeline in the ISSS office.
- ▶ Provide clear guidelines or personalized reminders for students.

IN YOUR WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING SESSIONS

- ▶ Host country-specific visa information sessions.
- ▶ Prepare enrollment documents.
- ▶ Encourage ISSS office meetings with the study abroad office.
- ▶ Hold orientations for staff and faculty members.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- ▶ Is there a way for you to preempt potential issues, such as timeliness or revealing status?
- ▶ Is there an established procedure in place that can help you support international students?
- ▶ Do you have a contact in the other office who can look things up in a pinch?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Internationalizing the International: International students who study abroad

by Davina Potts and Aleece Sisson, Michigan State University (unpublished)

Potts and Sisson reveal key attributes arising from their study of international students who take part in study abroad programs.

Basic Immigration Concepts for those Outside International Student Advising workshop

http://www.nafsa.org/Attend_Events/In-Person/Workshops/Basic_Immigration_Concepts_for_those_Outside_International_Student_Advising/

This 4-hour NAFSA workshop provides basic knowledge in immigration laws, SEVIS, the visa process, and other related topics for individuals from universities, colleges, and Intensive English Programs (IEPs), as well as advisers outside the United States. Topics covered include: visa types; applying for a visa; issuing an I-20 or DS-2019; reviewing financial documents; SEVIS fee; SEVIS; and international student employment.

EA Visa Help

www.nafsa.org/EAVisaHelp

EA Visa Help gives members access to EA professionals nationwide who are knowledgeable about EA visas for students studying abroad and who have contacts with consular officers at consulates throughout the United States. This free, online tool for study abroad advisers provides informed advice on student visas for the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Spain, and other countries as well as a liaison for international student visa questions for study abroad.

International Students Are an Emerging Market for Study Abroad

by Greg Grassi and Kira Espiritu International Educator, May/June 2010

http://www.nafsa.org/_/File/_/mayjun10_fs a.pdf

Authors Grassi and Espiritu share their experiences sending international students abroad at the University of San Diego. They give insights and best practices on how they collaborate in this area between the International Studies Abroad office and the Office of International Students and Scholars.

Student Visas: What You Need to Know Before You Go! – a NAFSA pamphlet for students by Kenya Casey and Mary Ryan Dando

<http://www.nafsa.org/wcm/Product?prodid=48>.

This pamphlet informs students about the entire student visa process. It provides much-needed information and commonsense steps to smooth the visa application process and avoid last-minute problems. Booklet includes top 10 do's and don'ts, FAQs, passport info, helpful websites, glossary of visa terms, and much more.

AUTHORS

Lynn Aguado manages Michigan State University (MSU) education abroad programs in France and Italy, and coordinates the MSU Office of Study Abroad scholarships. She has been a study abroad coordinator at MSU for six years, and is currently working part time on an MA in higher, adult, and lifelong education at the MSU College of Education.

Aguado got her BA in Spanish language and literature at the University of Michigan and spent an academic year studying at the Universidad de Sevilla in Seville, Spain. After returning home, she worked as a peer adviser in the University of Michigan study abroad office, which later led to a full-time position as a study abroad adviser. In addition to working at the University of Michigan and MSU, Aguado spent 10 years as a study abroad adviser and coordinator at the University of Missouri's International Center. She has been working in international education for more than 20 years, and has enjoyed helping numerous students have life-changing experiences through education abroad experiences all over the world.

Aguado has been active in the field of international education, giving presentations at regional and national conferences on topics such as study abroad visas, financial aid, scholarships for study abroad, and, most recently, working with international students participating in education abroad programs.

Margaret (Meg) Richmond is an immigration specialist at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), until recently serving as the associate director of the International Student & Scholar Office at Towson University. She earned her BA in English and Spanish from Wittenberg University in 2004, her MEd in international higher education leadership from Old Dominion University in 2006, and is currently pursuing her MA in modern French studies from the University of Maryland-College Park.

As an undergraduate, Richmond spent a year in Spain, and following her graduation she lived in France for two years. From 2008–2012, she worked as an international student adviser at the University of Maryland-College Park, focusing on F-1 and J-1 student cultural and immigration issues. From 2012–2014 she worked at Towson University. In January 2014 she took on her current position at the NIH. She has presented at several forums, including NAFSA regional and annual conferences, regarding developing policies to encourage study abroad for international students.

Corrie Fisher, senior learning designer, NAFSA Professional Learning Services, contributed to this resource.