



SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS:

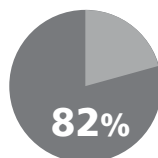
Study abroad advocacy is gaining momentum outside of the educational community. Even First Lady Michelle Obama has joined the discussion, speaking out in support of the long-term values of an international education experience. She is quoted during a March 2014 visit to Stanford University's Stanford Center at Peking University in China,

"The benefits of study abroad are almost endless . . . more and more companies are realizing that they need people with experiences around the world, who can speak different languages, who can transition easily into other cultures and people who bring to their jobs a sensibility and a sensitivity for other people. It will also make you more compassionate." (CNN Staff, 2014)

As most of the study abroad community is aware, these are not unsubstantiated claims; they are fact. Roughly ten years ago, the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) surveyed alumni from 49 years of IES study abroad programs.



98 PERCENT of respondents said that study abroad helped them better understand their own cultural values and biases.



82 PERCENT replied that study abroad contributed to their "developing a more sophisticated way of looking at the world." (Dwyer & Peters, 2004)

**BEST PRACTICES
AND SUCCESSFUL
STRATEGIES
FOR INCREASING
STUDY ABROAD
PARTICIPATION**

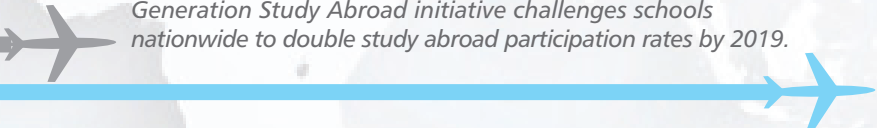


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Although these benefits have been widely understood within the international education community for years, it is encouraging to see the public support behind the initiative. Study abroad participation has been steadily increasing, but the IIE's 2013 Open Doors Report still shows less than 10% participation among undergraduates nationwide. (Institute of International Education, 2013) Each program is responsible for its own growth, but sharing best practices can help study abroad programs grow more rapidly.

IIE is doing its part to raise awareness through the Generation Study Abroad initiative, challenging schools nationwide to double their study abroad participation rates by 2019.

It will take widespread institutional involvement and a number of small steps to make study abroad more affordable, accessible and attractive to a broader range of students.



Generation Study Abroad initiative challenges schools nationwide to double study abroad participation rates by 2019.

This article highlights ideas from representatives at Valparaiso University, Case Western Reserve University, Kansas State University, Western Illinois University, Elon University, and Miami University (Ohio)—all of whom have committed to Generation Study Abroad.

OPEN DOORS

THROUGH CURRICULAR INTEGRATION

Representatives from all six schools communicated that the more tightly woven study abroad options are into the curriculum, the more likely students are to participate. The reason? College is expensive. Many students and parents balk at the idea of adding undue time and money for coursework that does not count toward graduation requirements.

"One of the biggest questions we get at the Office of International Programs is, 'When is the best time to go abroad?'" said Valparaiso University Director of Study Abroad, Julie Maddox. "It is advantageous for the student if those guidelines are already set within their specific major or department."

It is also important to proactively communicate with students so they know their available options and can plan their path to graduation accordingly.



EXAMPLES OF CURRICULAR INTEGRATION IN ACTION:

- **KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY**—At Kansas State University, first-year students are encouraged to participate in interest based learning communities—one of which has a study abroad element. Students meet in the fall for two interrelated courses, each worth three credits. Coursework is capped off over winter break with a one-credit service-learning trip to Costa Rica. K-State also has plans underway to offer "Minor Abroad" programs, during which students can earn the majority of their credits towards a minor during a term abroad.
- **CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY**—At Case Western Reserve University, students have a number of opportunities to turn their winter and spring breaks into intercultural learning experiences. Winter break programs enhance first semester courses, while spring break programs augment second semester courses.
- **MIAMI UNIVERSITY**—Miami University's Farmer School of Business offers a "China Business Program" as a complement to its business major. Upon completion of the certificate program, which has an overseas study requirement, students receive a notation on their academic transcript identifying them to future employers as China business specialists.

ENGAGE FACULTY SUPPORT

True curricular integration can only work with the support of the faculty and department chairs, so it is important for study abroad professionals to do as much as possible to gain their cooperation.

Some best practices shared by our panel:

- **Host “Lunch and Learn Sessions”**—The Case Western Reserve University Center for International Affairs invites faculty into their offices regularly for an educational lunch series. They discuss various international topics – from how to best support international students on campus, to risk management.
- **Provide Financial Support**—According to CWRU’s Study Abroad Advisor, Lisa Ann Brown, Case also “puts their money where their mouth is,” with a faculty seed grant initiative to assist faculty members who want to develop new international initiatives.
- **Build a Database**—Miami University is in the process of building a database that can be shared with faculty to help support a more coordinated effort of international partnerships and agreements. The idea is that if they are able to see existing connections, it will be simpler to build on those than to start anew.

INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY

“What does it mean to us to increase Study Abroad?” asked Miami University Associate Director of Global Initiatives Karla Guinigundo.

“In some ways it means looking at new and different ways to get students abroad—from more service learning opportunities and internships to an increasing array of faculty led programs.”

Examples shared by our panel include:

- Leveraging a formal 3-week winter term for shorter-term programs.
- Collaborating with the athletic department to create coordinated overseas learning, training, and competition opportunities for student-athletes.
- Reaching out to alumni and corporate partners to coordinate international internships.
- Taking advantage of external programs like Engineers Without Borders.
- Partnering with various departments on campus to develop more non-traditional research, co-op and internship programs abroad.
- Designing and publishing major specific pathways to study abroad and graduate on time.

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MINIMIZE

THE MARGINAL COSTS

No matter how many programs are out there, going overseas is not something everyone can afford without a little help. Recognizing this, schools have chosen to attack this barrier in multiple ways.



Here are a few of the courses of action suggested by our interview panel:

INCREASE SCHOLARSHIPS

- Dedicate personnel to hunt down new avenues of funding.
- Actively solicit strategic corporate partnerships.
- Collaborate with the development department to increase donor outreach.
- Pursue available grant funding.
- Engage alumni support.
- Build endowments to fund scholarships long term.
- Consider scholarships for freshman to start planting the seed early.

PURSUE MORE FLEXIBLE FUNDING

- Develop a loan program where students can borrow against their financial aid.
- Explore financial aid options that are not tied to FAFSA or donor requests.
- Assist students in pursuing merit-based opportunities that aren't tied to need.



COMBAT MISPERCEPTIONS

There are students who think study abroad is too expensive, will never work with their major, or is just not for people like them. These perceptions can only be addressed through consistent focused outreach.

Our interview panel shares their ideas.

- **Engage on-campus alumni**—"Students who have returned from a trip abroad often want to share their experiences with others," said Case Western Reserve University's Lisa Brown. "But they are not sure how to channel that energy. We are working on a way to organize them so they can help support and mentor other students who are thinking of going abroad."
- **Leverage social media**—"We have been using social media to promote the idea of studying abroad," said Western Illinois' Emily Gorlewski. "It's a simple thing, but has taken off. We ask for student volunteers

from our study abroad alumni, post a photo from when he or she was abroad, tag the student, and post it to our Facebook page. They don't necessarily 'like' our page, but they like their friends pages so because the students are tagged, their friends still see the posts."

- **Attack the issue with focused marketing**—"To really change perceptions you need to engage students through focused marketing," said Elon's Woody Pelton. "Find out where the underrepresented students are and then go there. Stapling the flyer on the dorm wall is not going to do it."
- **Actively promote scholarship opportunities**—"We promote the Gilman Scholarship," said Miami University's Guinigundo. "It is a need-based study abroad scholarship for Pell Grant recipients, that is one of the best out there and can really help students in a significant way."

CONCLUSION

While some of the program-specific ideas mentioned in this article, like Miami's China program, could be perceived as ground-breaking, most are just good ideas that will take legwork and institutional involvement to implement.

Michelle Obama called the benefits of study abroad "almost endless." The sharing of industry best practices will make it possible to achieve the goals set by Generation Study Abroad, increase participation, and enhance the student experience.



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Resources

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