



EXPLORING

THE WORLD ON FACULTY-LED PROGRAMS

Among the most popular faculty-led study abroad programs at Rutgers University are three offered by the Department of Kinesiology and Health. The short-term, summer programs, which are part of the university's Healthy Lifestyles Study Abroad Initiative, introduce students to the Mediterranean diet, stress management techniques, lifestyle and more.

The department has bolstered its faculty-led programs in the past few years thanks to Labros Sidossis, Ph.D., professor and chair of the department. A native of Greece and former professor at a university there, Sidossis has invaluable connections in the country that have led to the creation of top-quality, short-term programs at Rutgers.

"Dr. Sidossis believes strongly in international education and has really pushed his department to think about different opportunities for students over the summer and winter terms," says Daniel Loughrey, Program Manager for the Center for Global Education at Rutgers. "Students in kinesiology now know that while study abroad may not be required of them, it's a very strong and viable option."

Rutgers runs approximately 40 faculty-led programs annually—about half of all its study abroad offerings. The state university of New Jersey is not alone in valuing short-term, faculty-led programs. Nearly half of Elon University's global engagement opportunities are led by faculty, too.

UNIVERSITY FACULTY
HAVE UNIQUE INSIGHT
AND EXPERTISE THAT CAN
BE TAPPED INTO DURING
FACULTY-LED STUDY
ABROAD PROGRAMS.



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“Short-term, faculty-led programs can be a very important global engagement experience,” says Woody Pelton, Dean of Global Education at Elon, a mid-sized private university in North Carolina. “They haven’t always been appreciated in the same way as semester-long programs, but they are valid and valuable programs when done well.”

TAPPING INTO THE ADVANTAGES OF FACULTY-LED PROGRAMS

There are numerous benefits to faculty-led programs for both students and colleges and their faculty. They can:

- **Broaden a school’s study abroad offerings.**

“You’re opening the door to more students and making study abroad opportunities available to people who may not be able to do a semester or year-long program,” says Pelton. “We don’t want to make global engagement available just to those students who have the time, money and major that lends itself to study abroad. We want to identify and knock down barriers to global engagement, making it available to 100 percent of our students.” Currently, 80 percent of Elon students participate in a global engagement experience.



- **Foster relationships between students and faculty.**

“The opportunity to develop a rapport with professors from the University of Arkansas is one of the biggest factors drawing students to faculty-led programs,” says Sarah Malloy, Assistant Director for Faculty-Led Programs at the University of Arkansas. “There’s a built-in sense of community because our faculty are wonderfully involved throughout the process.” Many of the 40 or so short-term, faculty-led programs offered by the state university include weekly sessions during the semester prior to departure, where students and faculty not only learn about the program in advance, but also get to know one another.

- **Enhance a professor’s pedagogical toolbox.**

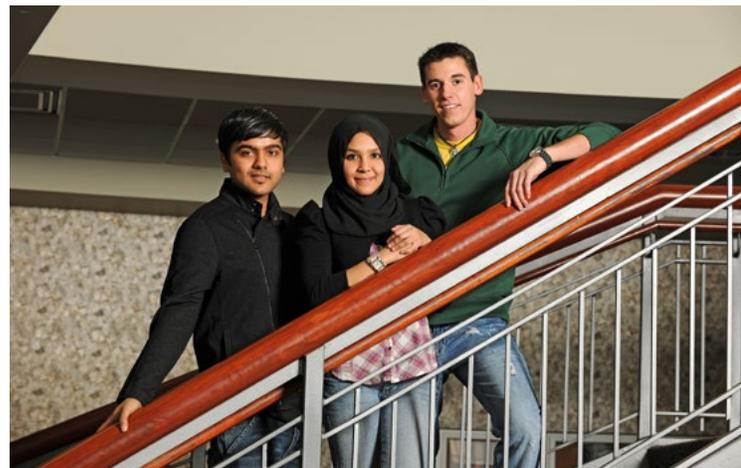
“An art history course that’s taught abroad is significantly different than one that’s taught here in New Brunswick, N.J.,” says Loughrey. “There are no classrooms—the monuments and museums serve as classrooms. It’s a much more hands-on experience.”

- **Immerse students in a new discipline.**

“It’s an opportunity for our faculty to shine and expose students to more of the discipline they are dedicated to,” says Malloy. “The students might come back with a new passion for anthropology or the French language.” Similarly, professors often return rejuvenated. “I’ve seen faculty just as transformed as students through the experience,” says DeDe Long, Director of Study Abroad and International Exchange at the University of Arkansas.

- **Incorporate reflection in the experience.**

“You want students to stop and think about the study abroad experience while they are away,” says Pelton. “When you send a student away for semester on a third-party provider program, maybe that’s happening and maybe not. When you have faculty leading a short-term program, there’s no escaping it. Faculty are with the group every day making sure that students are stopping and reflecting on where they are.”



AVOIDING POTENTIAL PITFALLS

While faculty-led programs offer definite advantages, they aren't without downsides. Here are some of the possible problems, most of which can be avoided—or their effects diminished—with proper planning:

- **Acting as an insulated group.** During faculty-led programs, students travel in a cohort from their university. They don't typically have to navigate new places or make decisions on their own. "One of the advantages of being in a semester-long program is there are more opportunities to get lost. I like for a student to get lost because then they have to find themselves," says Pelton. "With short-term, faculty-led programs, there are less opportunities to encounter challenges unless the professors are clever and build them into the programs. But that's hard to do."
- **Drowning in the details.** "Faculty-led programs are very labor intensive. Our department is juggling 500 students and 80 faculty members at any one time," says Long. "There's always some new idea that a faculty member has, and it's hard to keep up and stay ahead of the game in terms of policies and procedures." Long adds that once everything comes together, the results are great. To help ensure attention to detail, the University of Arkansas depends on its software, TDS for Study Abroad, to manage the process.
- **Dealing with problems in country.** Kenn Gaither, Associate Dean and Professor in the School of Communications at Elon, says the ideal faculty-led programs team with a third-party provider or educational



travel service to handle logistics in country, such as ground transport and guide services. "If you have a strictly faculty-led program without outside assistance or support, you don't have a whole lot of bandwidth should something go wrong," says Gaither. And things can easily go wrong, from broken down tour busses to sick students.



- **Designing outlier study abroad programs.** While a professor may want to lead a study abroad program on Peruvian pottery or tribal languages in Cameroon, such narrowly defined programs may not gain traction with students. "We encourage programs to be strongly integrated into their department's curriculum," says Loughrey. "We found that programs that are well integrated and count toward a major or minor requirement do significantly better in terms of enrolling students than programs that just go toward an elective or free course." Study abroad can be expensive, he adds, and students "want to get the most bang for their buck."





ENSURING YOUR PROGRAMS ARE **TOP-NOTCH**

Faculty-led programs are a reflection of your university, so they need to meet high standards. Some of the steps taken by the University of Arkansas, Elon and Rutgers to make certain they offer high-quality programs include the following:



Development of a rigorous proposal process. Faculty at Rutgers who want to lead a study abroad program first submit a proposal to the Center for Global Education, including a course description or draft syllabus, information on local partners they plan to work with and the faculty member's experience and background in the host country. The proposal is reviewed and approved by a committee of faculty members from across the university representing most of the schools and colleges. "The committee exists to ensure that these programs are inherently academic and students will have a great experience," says Loughrey.



Institutional support and training for faculty. "The fact that you're a really good history professor doesn't necessarily mean you are good at leading a group of students away from campus," says Pelton. Elon offers workshops for professors who engage in faculty-led programs that cover everything from pedagogical tools (How do you teach without Wi-Fi?) to trip logistics (What do you do when a student gets sick?).



Pre-departure seminars and activities for students. Because faculty-led programs are often shorter in duration, it's important to prepare students as much as possible in advance so they can hit the ground running when they arrive at their destination. An international business seminar offered by the University of Arkansas in India provides a good example of this. Before students depart for the three-week summer program, they participate in several day-long seminars held on Saturdays during the spring semester. "The professor does a great job providing the background that I always worry students might not get before they leave," says Long. "They learn about Indian culture, traditions, history and politics." The professor also holds a luncheon for students' families to receive an overview of the program and first-hand account from past participants.



Promotion of faculty-led programs. "The promotional part should not be underestimated: You've got to sell a course and populate it," says Gaither, who has co-led a program to Turkey for first-year honors fellows along with a history professor from Elon. "It's important to create a culture so that the students are intellectually curious and the course is promoted in such a way that it taps into that curiosity." There are lots of ways to generate interest in programs, from social media campaigns to on-campus presentations by past participants.

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With proper planning, faculty-led programs are a valuable component to a university's global engagement efforts, accomplishing what all study abroad programs aim to do: **“Study abroad puts students in environments that are different and foreign, and there's no technology that can take the place of touching, feeling, seeing—engaging all senses,”** says Gaither. “There's no replacement for standing on the Great Wall in China or sitting down with an Indian family for a meal.”



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