

# ON THE ROAD TO A DIPLOMA

UNIVERSITIES EMPLOY SEVERAL STRATEGIES TO HELP STUDENTS WHO STUDY ABROAD STAY ON TRACK FOR ON-TIME GRADUATION.



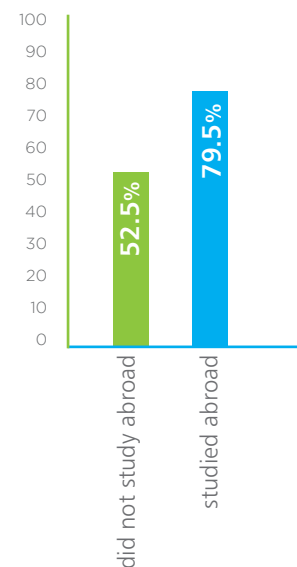
**T**he University of Minnesota addresses common concerns about study abroad programs on the web, in ad campaigns and in print materials. One frequently asked question is whether study abroad will delay graduation. The answer is a resounding “no.”

“We have data that quite clearly shows a positive correlation between studying abroad and on-time or better than on-time graduation,” says Brook Blahnik, Associate Director of the Learning Abroad Center at the University of Minnesota. A 2010 study by the university revealed that 52.5 percent of students who did not study abroad graduated in four years or less compared to 79.5 percent of the learning abroad cohort.

Students at the University of California, San Diego who study abroad also have better four-year and five-year graduation rates than those who don’t, according to Jim Galvin, Director of Opportunities Abroad and Faculty-Led Programs at UC San Diego. He offers this explanation: “Study abroad helps students develop an academic plan and provides motivation to follow that plan, so they then graduate on time at a higher percentage.”

But ensuring that students can study abroad and graduate on time also requires careful planning on the part of universities, too. Here are seven ways to help students stay on track for on-time graduation:

Percentage of students graduating in 4 years or less



# SEVEN WAYS TO HELP STUDENTS STAY ON TRACK

**Invest a lot of time** in program development. “Make sure you develop partnerships with international institutions and organizations that offer courses and curricular opportunities that fit well with your home institution’s curriculum,” says Craig Rinker, Director of Global Education at Georgetown University. Each year more than 900 Georgetown students travel abroad to earn academic credit in over 40 countries. All of the university’s undergraduate schools offer numerous study abroad opportunities that count toward degree requirements. For example, students enrolled in the McDonough School of Business may spend a semester at the University College Dublin—Quinn School of Business, while nursing students may enroll in a clinical program at the University of Botswana.



## **Integrate study abroad programs** into the curriculum.

“Build study abroad opportunities into the curriculum for each major on your campus, not just for English majors to study Shakespeare in London,” says Galvin. There are endless options: Marine biology majors can travel to Australia and dive on the Great Barrier Reef. Students in a pre-med program could participate in a public health program in Latin America. Engineering students could spend a semester at Osaka University in Tokyo, where they have some of the world’s most advanced electron microscopes.

**Offer a variety** of study abroad options. The University of Minnesota offers 300 programs in more than 80 countries. The formats range from traditional semester-long programs to exchange programs and faculty-led, short-term programs. “Some of these follow a particular model, like global seminars or freshman seminars, and some of these are crafted and run by various departments on campus,” says Blahnik. “So we have variety in duration, type and subjects. We strive to have academic options for all students on campus.”



**Get academic advisors involved.** Blahnik says there are many good study abroad options available to students, but planning should be done well in advance. That planning requires collaboration with academic advisors. “The more that academic advisors work with students and send them our way for early intervention planning for an experience abroad, the richer the program choices will be for that student,” says Blahnik. Guidance from academic advisors also helps ensure that students complete any core requirements or general education courses necessary to study abroad, allowing them to select programs that dovetail with their majors.

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**Involve academic advisors**



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**Work closely with faculty.** “Faculty are the content experts in the academic disciplines,” says Blahnik. “What experiences would they like for students in their majors? What types of classwork would they not be comfortable giving credit? Why not?” He encourages universities to keep faculty abreast of all the study abroad opportunities available and involve them when taking on new partnerships.

**Create a system for curriculum matching.** All of Georgetown’s undergraduate schools maintain databases of course equivalencies, so they know that course X at an international university is the equivalent of course Y at Georgetown. “It streamlines the process for students who are looking to take a specific course overseas,” says Rinker. “We can guide them on which programs are more apt to fill the requirement and transfer the credit.”

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**Develop an institutional review process** to examine all your study abroad programs on a regular basis. Involve the academic deans and faculty. Review whether the courses are timely and relevant. “The greatest challenge we face is making sure we change with the times, the needs of our students and the ever-evolving world of higher education,” says Rinker.

With thoughtful planning, study abroad programs can be a rewarding experience for students on the way to earning their diplomas. “Everybody looks at higher education as an investment,” says Rinker. “We want to do our part to ensure students stay on course to graduate on time. We need to constantly adjust our offerings and look at study abroad as a worthwhile investment of our students’ time.”

***“It’s the combination of careful planning and the life-changing elements of the experience that really propels the study abroad student forward in terms of retention, graduation and student satisfaction.”***

*-Jim Galvin, Director of Opportunities Abroad and Faculty-Led Programs,  
University of California, San Diego*



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