

Diversity in Study Abroad

WHY YOU NEED IT—AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT.



TERRADOTTA



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Introduction

The United States' population is increasingly diverse—and so are college campuses. According to the [American Council on Education](#), students of color comprised just under 30% of the undergraduate student population in 1996. By 2016, the total was up to 45%.

But even as our college campuses reflect a broader swath of Americans, study abroad students do not. The face of a typical study abroad student remains the same as it was decades ago: a white woman.

According to the [2019 Open Doors report](#), 30% of all U.S. study abroad students were a racial or ethnic minority during the 2017-18 academic year. That's up from 18% in 2007-08, but the total still lags behind the diversity represented on college campuses across the country.

For study abroad leaders, attracting new groups of participants is vital for two primary reasons.

- 1 More students can take advantage of the benefits of study abroad**—from opportunities to build their confidence to a chance to hone the skills that are critical to compete in today's global workplace.
- 2 Study abroad programs remain robust** because they draw participants from the entire student body instead of an increasingly smaller pool of students.

Here's how to achieve diversity in your study abroad program.

Study Abroad: By the Numbers

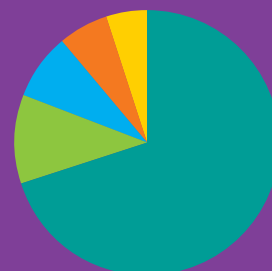
Gender



2017-18

67% ■ Women
33% ■ Men

Race and Ethnicity



2017-18

70% ■ White
11% ■ Hispanic
8% ■ Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
6% ■ Black or African-American
5% ■ Other

Gender totals have remained relatively unchanged in the last decade, but there have been some gains in the number of racially or ethnically diverse participants.

Source: [Open Doors Report](#), [U.S. Study Abroad Profile](#)

STUDY ABROAD

The Cost and Value Equation



Cost can be a major barrier to studying abroad, especially for underrepresented students who are struggling to afford the cost of a college education. But as anybody in study abroad knows, affordable options exist and might be even cheaper than the tuition and fees at a student's U.S. institution. Financial aid, scholarships and grants all can make study abroad affordable for just about any student.

But it's not just about cost. ***When meeting with prospective students and their parents, value should factor into the equation too.*** As they enter the increasingly global workforce, study abroad students gain:

- Awareness and understanding of different cultures.
- Strong language skills.
- The ability to work on diverse teams.
- A global perspective.
- Self-reliance as they successfully operate in a new place.

Study Abroad Pays Off

When compared to their non-traveling peers, study abroad students enjoy big dividends:

15%

more likely
to graduate in
four years

90%

found their first job
within six months of
graduation, compared
to 49% for others

\$7,000

more for starting
salary

Sources: [IES Abroad](#), [UC San Diego](#)

PASSPORT

DIVERSE STUDENTS ABROAD

Clear the Roadblocks

While cost is a big reason why underrepresented students don't study abroad, that's not the only issue they face. College students come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and there's more to diversity than race, ethnicity and gender. To expand their programs, study abroad leaders must expand their definition of diversity too—and be aware of the hurdles that keep a student from studying overseas.

First-Generation College Students

As higher education institutions launch major efforts to lure more first-generation college students, they now make up about one third of college students today, according to the [Center for First-Generation Student Success](#).

→ **Study Abroad Roadblock:** First-generation college students face a host of challenges as they contemplate their study abroad options, especially a lack of funding. Work schedules and family commitments could also conflict with an extended trip.

Low-Income Students

The total number of low-income students increased from 12% in 1996 to 20% in 2016, according to the [Pew Research Center](#).

→ **Study Abroad Roadblock:** Like some first-generation students, low-income students also struggle with funding, support, and job and family responsibilities.

LGBTQ Students

According to the American College Health Association, among a sample of 33,000 undergraduate students, [10% identified](#) as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, asexual, pansexual or questioning.

→ **Study Abroad Roadblock:** Travel can be a challenge for members of the LGBTQ community in countries where they may face discrimination, violence and few legal protections. Harassment and the inability to express who they are could worsen any existing mental health issues.



Religiously Diverse Students

As the U.S. population becomes more diverse, so do the religions they practice. According to a [survey of college students by the Interfaith Youth Core](#), 57% of respondents said they identified as Protestant, Orthodox or

Roman Catholic. One in four were non-religious. And 12% belonged to minority U.S. religions, such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Mormonism.

→ **Study Abroad Roadblock:** Like ethnically or racially diverse students and those from the LGBTQ community, students from religious minorities can face discrimination and violence. Some also may worry about how they'll practice their faith when abroad.



Disabled Students

The number of students with learning disabilities, mobility issues, mental health conditions and other impairments is growing, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. In 2012, [11% of undergraduates](#) lived with a disability.

→ **Study Abroad Roadblock:** Like others, they may experience discrimination, violence and the lack of legal protections. Some countries may offer few accommodations that allow them to safely navigate a city. Some might worry about being away from their health care providers and whether the appropriate resources exist at their destination.

BE CAREFUL!

When looking for ways to cut costs, study abroad programs often fall back on two options, which can sometimes hurt more than help their diversity efforts:

1 They strip out activities, letting participants pick and choose what they're able to afford.

This can leave some students feeling ostracized as they watch their peers fly off for a weekend excursion or take part in another expensive activity. When those students return home, they'll share their less-than-stellar experience with their peers and possibly discourage them from studying abroad.

2 They add more short-term programs, which can appear less expensive.

But, because these trips often take place during a school break, they likely would be an extra cost for the student, not part of the normal tuition.

6 WAYS TO DIVERSIFY Study Abroad Participants

1 Consider the Barriers

Cost, family responsibilities and expectations, and academic requirements can be obstacles for any student, but particularly for those who represent a minority group. Here's how to help:

- Make it easy for them to access information about financial aid, scholarships and grants.
- Highlight the value of study abroad and its impact on a student's future career with materials and information sessions designed for parents and students.
- Find evangelists among faculty members across departments who can help students build an academic plan that includes study abroad.



2

Streamline the Application Process

You may have sold a student on study abroad, but if the application is onerous and time-consuming, you could quickly lose them, especially if they're juggling work, school and other obligations. Look for ways to reduce the number of steps required to complete the application.

3

Don't Forget the Details

Traditional study abroad students have little trouble paying for passport fees or deposits. But for students who are dependent on financial aid or have little to no family support, these upfront costs can be a stumbling block. Be mindful of these hardships. Ask students if they can afford the deposit or have a passport. Seek out programs that can help. [CIEE's Passport Caravan](#), for example, sponsors passports for students in need. The U.S. government also offers scholarships and grants.

4

Fine-tune Your Marketing

White women comprise the majority of study abroad participants — and many of the staffers within study abroad offices. And that means that students from a variety of backgrounds who read marketing materials, meet up with representatives at on-campus activity fairs or visit the study abroad office primarily encounter ... white women.

Find ways to feature underrepresented groups in your materials too.

- Reach out to faculty members from diverse backgrounds to talk with students about their own experiences traveling abroad.
- Sign on study abroad alums from diverse backgrounds to help you promote the program.
- Meet with student organizations who represent diverse groups to tout the benefits of study abroad.



5

Diversify Your Programs

Europe has long been a popular destination for U.S. students, but a diversified student body expects more diverse experiences. Many destinations outside Europe also are more affordable. Look for programs and locations that would appeal to a broad range of student interests and backgrounds.

Not Just Europe: Study Abroad Destination Growth in 2017-18



Source: [Open Doors Report, U.S. Study Abroad Destinations](#)

6

Build a Fan Base

As you attract a more diverse group of study abroad participants, anticipate their unique questions and concerns and make sure they're answered during their pre-departure orientation. Will a Muslim student know where they can worship abroad? Is a gay or lesbian student aware of the laws and expectations at their destination? Is a black student prepared to travel to a place where few people of color ever visit?

If you've properly readied them for their travels, they're more likely to return excited about their trip and ready to recommend study abroad to their peers. And, as you work to diversify your study abroad participants, this fan base of diverse student travelers, eager to share their life-changing experiences, may be your biggest secret weapon yet.

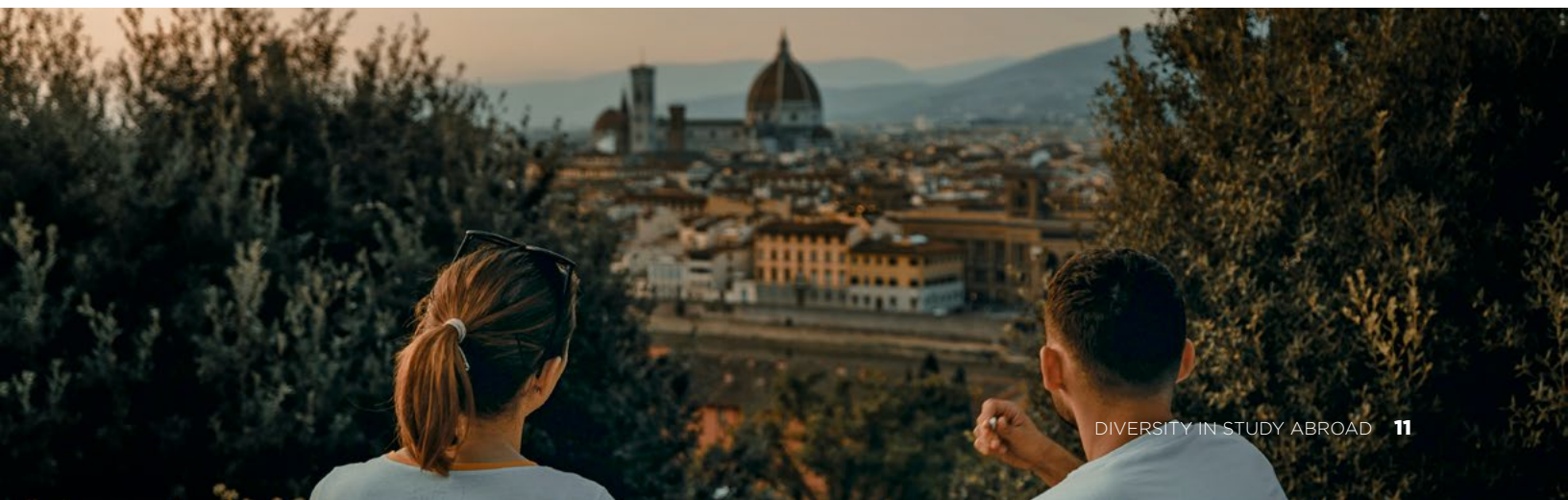
CASE STUDY: GONZAGA UNIVERSITY

When he took over as Gonzaga University's director for The Center for Global Engagement seven years ago, Richard Menard was charged with two goals: Pull up study abroad participation to 50% of the student body and boost the diversity of those participants to ensure they come from a broad range of ethnic, socio-economic and academic backgrounds.

Gonzaga took a multi-prong approach to meet those goals, and they've paid off. Here's what they did—and are continuing to do—to reach across the student body.

- 1 Whittled down their study abroad options to less than 100**, so when students came in to learn more about programs, staff could speak with knowledge and authority about each one.
- 2 Worked with STEM deans to remove barriers** that prevented students in some academic programs from studying abroad. The deans traveled overseas to learn more about particular programs firsthand.
- 3 Built a robust series of programs to educate parents about study abroad and its benefits.** The programs are designed with all students in mind, but staff is particularly thoughtful about issues that families with first-generation students or from marginalized backgrounds may face. That includes creating online webinars so parents who don't have the means to travel to campus can learn more about study abroad at home, on their own time. Gonzaga also is working to roll out printed materials and presentations in Spanish and Chinese by 2021.

- 4 Meets with students involved in Building Relationships in Diverse Gonzaga Environments,** a summer pre-orientation and first-year peer mentoring program for first-generation and low-income students and those who represent a racial minority or are LGBTQ+ or undocumented, along with their parents, to tout the opportunities in study abroad.
- 5 Seeks student opinions about study abroad.** While many institutions rely on faculty members to recommend destinations, Gonzaga goes straight to the students to understand where they'd like to travel and what they'd like to learn. From there, they meet with faculty members to match up students' picks with Gonzaga's degree programs. Thanks to student requests, Gonzaga has added locations in Africa and South America, including Chile, which is now its most popular South American destination.
- 6 Created and runs the Gonzaga in Florence Scholarship,** which identifies high school students who are interested in study abroad during the application process and, once admitted, provides them with a scholarship to study at Gonzaga's campus in Florence, Italy. Preferences are given to students with financial need and those from underrepresented groups in the program, among others. Twenty to 25 students travel to Florence on the scholarship each year. "In some cases, it's the only thing making it possible to study abroad," Menard said.
- 7 Reaches out by email to Pell Grant recipients each semester to let them know about available study abroad scholarships,** such as the Gilman Scholarship, and lets them know staff is available to help them with essays and applications. In the last six years, more than 100 Gonzaga students have applied for the Gilman Scholarship; 20 have won.



GONZAGA: BY THE NUMBERS

Undergrad
Students

122%
increase

Graduate
Students

59%
increase

Pell Grant
Recipients

21%
increase

First-
Generation
Students

31%
increase

Undergraduate

2006-07 : 373
2018-19 : 830

Graduate

2006-07 : 58
2018-19 : 92

Pell Grant Recipients

2014-15 : 62
2018-19 : 75

First-Generation

2014-15 : 77
2018-19 : 101

PRO TIP

“

It takes a lot of really thinking about what goals you're trying to achieve. The first place I really encourage people to start with is talking to the students. Get in with the students themselves, hear what types of programs they want to go to, what kind of academic and co-curricular experiences they are looking for.”

—RICHARD MENARD

*Director of Gonzaga's Center
for Global Engagement*

56%

of undergraduate
students studied
abroad in 2017-18



IN THE TRENCHES

CASE STUDY: PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

At Prairie View A&M University in Texas, just 24 students studied abroad in 2015, the year Evie Myers took the role of executive director of international programs and senior international officer. At the time, students at the historically black public university thought continuing their education in another country was too expensive or not an option for them. It was Myers' job to strip away the obstacles and build up the program.

She's done just that. In 2019, 124 students studied abroad—a 417% increase from 2015. Here's how Myers did it.

Parent Conversations

Myers started making more efforts to reach out to parents. During on-campus orientation, for example, Myers holds separate sessions for parents where she demonstrates that study abroad is safe and their children can thrive when they travel and learn elsewhere.

Free Passports

The first thing anybody needs to go out of the country is a passport. But students at Prairie View, who often are first-generation college students and

Pell Grant eligible, didn't know how to get one and didn't have the funds to pay for it. So Myers reached out to CIEE Passport Caravan, which has provided thousands of free passports to college students. Through CIEE, Prairie View has signed up hundreds of students for free passports since 2017-18. She even launched a social media hashtag campaign. Students got a T-shirt that said #PVpassportready and were encouraged to snap a picture and post it on social media.

In 2019, 124 students studied abroad—a **417% increase** from 2015. Here's how Myers did it.



#PVGoesGlobal

Myers also went to social media as she marketed Prairie View's study abroad opportunities. She printed the hashtag #PVGoesGlobal on T-shirts and string backpacks and encouraged students to snap a picture of them wearing the bag or shirt while abroad and share it on social media. Testimonials also are featured on the [PV Goes Global YouTube channel](#).

Faculty-Led Ambassador Program

Starting in 2016, Prairie View launched the Faculty-Led Ambassador Program to encourage professors to create study abroad programs for students. With a \$2,000 stipend, faculty members could

travel to a destination of their choice to build an on-campus class that includes a trip to the country during spring break. The program took off. And now students who went on a week-long spring break trip with a professor are signing up for semester-long study abroad programs.

Proper Preparations

Anybody traveling to a new country for the first time can suffer from culture shock and inconveniences, but it can be a more difficult experience for students from diverse backgrounds. Prairie View prepares students before they go.

For African American students, for example, hair care abroad is a barrier. So Prairie View brings in outside companies to talk to students about what to do with their hair when they travel for longer than a week. Students also are prepped for other encounters they may face in their travels because of their ethnicity. For example, in countries with few people of color, some people may come up to the students to touch their hair. "You can move and say, 'no, thank you,' or you can just let them touch you," Myers tells students. "We're just getting our students ready that this can happen."

Student Meetups

Myers always looks to connect with students where they are—from meeting with Greek organizations to attending traditional on-campus gatherings every Wednesday—to showcase study abroad opportunities. She also plants yard signs around campus with information about where the study abroad office is. And she uses social media as well—posting on LinkedIn and Twitter and enlisting students to mention study abroad on Snapchat.

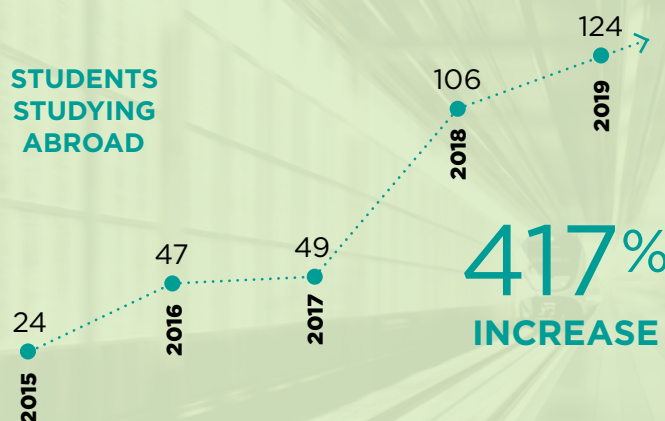
PRO TIP

“My advice is they have to go where their students are. If there are multicultural programs on campus or if there is a Black Student Union, they have to get out of their comfort zone and they need to go where the students are and be friendly. If they get a student of color to go abroad, they need to promote that student. They need to have that student work in their office. Because when students come into their offices and everybody doesn't look like them, they don't feel like they can go.”

—EVIE MYERS

Executive Director Of International Programs and Senior International Officer at Prairie View A&M University

Prairie View Study Abroad: By the Numbers





Ready to streamline your study abroad applications? Terra Dotta can help.
Visit www.terradotta.com or email us today at info@terradotta.com to learn more.

