



# DECIDING IF STUDY ABROAD IS RIGHT FOR YOU

A HANDBOOK ADMINISTERED BY THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION (OIE)  
CREATED BY ANNELISE ANDRADE, CLARISSA STEWART & MEGAN DIECK



GHANA, AFRICA. PHOTO BY MERRITT COLLEGE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM, 2016

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# A Message from the Office of International Education

At Peralta Community College District our mission is to promote student success, provide our diverse community with educational opportunities, and to transform lives. We strive to educate students that become active community members and global citizens. One way to achieve this goal is to encourage our students to seek study abroad opportunities. Each year over 300,000 U.S. students study abroad. In an increasingly interconnected globalized world, international education has never been more important than it is now. The Office of International Education has designed this Study Abroad Handbook to assist its students in achieving an international education that will result in the knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare them for personal, professional and academic success.

# HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is intended to help you decide if study abroad is the right choice for you. The first part provides a set of self-reflection questions. The second half address frequently asked questions and concerns. Please read through and determine if study abroad is for you. If it is, we invite you to read the next handbook *Program Selection, Finances and Application*. We encourage you to visit International Services Manager Drew Gephart to discuss all things study abroad. He can be contacted at the Office of International Education at (510) 587-7834 or [dgephart@peralta.edu](mailto:dgephart@peralta.edu).



**Visit Our Website:** <http://web.peralta.edu/international/study-abroad>



# DECIDING IF STUDY ABROAD IS RIGHT FOR YOU

**Study abroad is much more than a “life-changing” experience. It offers real-world value and practical skill-building.**

The previous handbook provided an overview of study abroad and its professional, academic, and personal benefits. However, you may still be unsure if study abroad is right for you. Study abroad may not be the best option for everyone. But if you think studying abroad is not an option for you due to certain barriers, then think again! These assumptions can lead you to miss out on an opportunity that could positively impact your life.

There are four general questions to ask yourself when considering study abroad. We suggest you answer these questions in the table below as truthfully as possible. The goal is to assist you articulate your goals so you can decide if study abroad is the right option for you.

## **1. What do I really want from this experience?**

*Are these goals realistic? Why do you want to achieve them?*

## **2. How will this experience help shape me academically, professionally and/or personally?**

## **3. Am I choosing to study abroad for an educational experience?**

*If the answer is no, you may want to consider other options like travel tours or service learning.*

## **4. What will I gain abroad that I can't get from my home campus?**



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Have you decided study abroad is the right decision for you, but still have concerns? You're not alone! We've compiled a list of Frequently Asked Questions about study abroad from California Community College students to help address these questions. We also encourage you to make an appointment or stop by the Office of International Education. We'd love to discuss your personal concerns and help launch your study abroad search!

## **Can I afford to study abroad?**

This is the number one concern community college students at PCCD report. Don't let this concern stop you from pursuing an international education! There are several budget friendly programs and financing options offered by PCCD and other organizations that are tailored to students just like you. Please read the financial aid section in the handbook *Program Selection, Finances & Application* for resources.

## **Are there programs exclusive to community college students?**

PCCD and other California community colleges offer programs exclusive to community college students. But you are not limited to those options! Check out other program providers. Studying abroad in a program with a diverse group of students is a great way to expand your network and meet new people. The *Program Selection, Finances & Application Handbook* will have resources specific to you.

## **Do men study abroad?**

Men do study abroad, and the numbers are increasing annually. According to the 2014-2015 Open Doors Report, men make up approximately 29.8% of the community college student population that studies abroad. While that certainly is not the majority, each year more and more men are adding a competitive edge to their resume by participating in international education. Studying abroad allows you to obtain the practical global skills that employers are seeking.

## **Are athletes allowed to study abroad?**

Being an athlete should never stop you from pursuing an international education. There are short term programs available that are off-season and will fit in with your school and practice schedule.

There are even programs that will allow you to play your sport abroad! Just make sure you check with you coach first.

The *Program Selection, Finances & Application Handbook* will have resources specific to you that can assist you in finding the perfect program!



## **Will the world accept my sexual orientation?**

The study abroad experience is one that can allow LGBTQ students the opportunity to view their sexual identity from a new cultural perspective. What LGBTQ means as a social identity is different depending on the country and in fact, other cultures may use language to describe non-heteronormative sexualities and genders that do not always accurately translate into English. Your host nation may be more tolerant of LGBTQ individuals than the U.S. However, in some cultures, openly talking about non-heteronormative sexuality is forbidden and certain behaviors may even be illegal. Some countries criminalize homosexuality and open hostility toward members of this population is considered acceptable behavior.

The *Program Selection, Finances Aid & Application Handbook* will have resources specific to you that will assist you in finding the perfect program!

### **I am a working professional, how can I justify the time off to my boss?**

Finding time off from work is difficult, even for short term programs. Some jobs only allow two-weeks paid vacation, and using those hours on a study abroad trip may not be the most ideal situation. Consider some programs that work best for your career and develop a plan that clearly articulates how this experience will benefit the company in the long run. Then pitch this idea to HR or your boss. There might be educational or volunteer incentives you were unaware of that can help you take advantage of this opportunity!

### **Can undocumented students go abroad?**

The simple answer is yes, DACA students have participated in study abroad.

However, due to the constant changes within the government in regards to DACA students, we require that all PCCD students seek counsel from an immigration lawyer or recognized/accredited organization or representative for legal advice or for legal assistance. We encourage you to please visit NAFSA's online "Resource Page on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals" for more information.

## **Is study abroad feasible for students with disabilities?**

Study abroad is feasible and highly encouraged for students with disabilities! In addition to the academic, professional and personal benefit, living in another country will give you a new perspective on how other cultures treat people with disabilities. While attitudes towards those with disabilities may drastically differ from what you're used to in the U.S. - reflected in people's actions and the resources available, these challenges should not discourage you. The OIE or program provider can often make arrangements for accommodations.

### **Must Ask Questions for Students with Disabilities:**

- How are people with my disability viewed abroad?
- Am I willing to disclose my disability to others?
- How accessible are places in my host country?
- Will inaccessibility prevent me from participating in certain excursions/activities?

### **Tips for Students with Disabilities:**

- Talk with other students with disabilities & learn about their experiences abroad.
- Let your counselor or program director know about your disability, if you are comfortable doing so, so that as many accommodations as possible can be made.
- Keep in mind that places abroad may not be as accessible as you are used to.
- Research how your disability is viewed in your host country before you go so you have some idea of what to expect.
- Be flexible and think creatively about your disability abroad can be accommodated while abroad.



### **Can you study abroad without speaking a second language?**

A large portion of existing programs do not have a language requirement. But this isn't to say that you shouldn't learn another language while you go abroad!

Even if you go abroad to an English speaking country or on a program taught in English, learning local words will engage you more in cultural learning. The OIE challenges you to challenge yourself! Pick up a few keywords, or enroll in a language course. It can have a huge pay off down the road.

### **Is it worth studying abroad if I do not have a major?**

In addition to the multiple benefits of studying abroad, it can allow students a chance to learn more about what their personal and professional interests are. You can go abroad to satisfy other course requirements, and return home with clarity that may guide you to choose a major or program you did not consider prior.

### **Will study abroad delay my degree track?**

A major study that surveyed over 17,000 university and community college students revealed that the four-year graduation rate was 49.6% for students participating in study abroad and 42.1% for students in the control group. An even larger gap was found in five-year graduation rates, which were 82.6% and 74.7% respectively. Another 6 year study found that those who had participated in study abroad had a fifth year graduation rate of 91% against 84% for nonparticipants. Both of these studies demonstrate study abroad participation has a positive correlation to timely program completion.

### **If I leave, won't I miss out on everything back home?**

Study abroad takes you away from the familiar and introduces you to the unknown. You will miss out on some events and people back home may change. But it isn't a permanent situation. It is an opportunity for you to venture out and gain independence. Going away for 2 weeks to a year will allow you to grow professionally, academically and personally. Although things may not be exactly the same when you return, you can work out fun and unique ways to integrate your international experience back into your daily life. As the great psychologist Jean Piaget says, "Learning occurs when there is the optimal amount of discomfort!"



## **How will my race and ethnicity be perceived abroad?**

In the U.S. you might often be classified by your ethnicity, but abroad, you may be identified first as an American. The people you meet will likely have an opinion about the U.S., and may be eager to tell you what they think, positive or negative. Whether or not people identify you as an American, they may make assumptions based on your physical appearance. Many people you encounter abroad will show a sincere interest in your culture. There may be people who stare at you or who are eager to touch your hair or your skin. Others may ask insensitive questions about your cultural heritage, physical features, or national origins. If you are abroad in an area where people have had little or no contact with individuals like yourself, people tend to be very curious, especially children.

If somebody says or does something that is offensive to you, try to distinguish between a person who is genuinely curious about you and your culture and someone who has bad intentions. You may find yourself in some uncomfortable situations, so always remember to put your safety first.

### **Must Ask Questions:**

- How is my ethnic group perceived in my host country? What kind of stereotypes are there?
- How should I react if I find something to be offensive?
- Has my host family housed students like me before? If not, will this be an issue for them?
- Will there be other minority students in my program?
- Who will I contact if I do face discriminatory incidents?
- Does my program have support staff that will understand and help me through such an incident?

### **Tips for Minority Students**

- Remember that people abroad have different cultural norms and may be less “politically correct” than people in the U.S.
- Build a support network among other study abroad students so that if there is an incident you'll have support to deal with it.
- Be prepared if an incident does arise, but don't go abroad expecting racism or discrimination.

## **Can you study abroad with dependents?**

Studying abroad with dependents will require extra work, but it can be done.

**Housing:** It is more likely that homestays will accommodate dependents than dorms or residence halls. Finding housing independently of the program may require advance arrival and be more costly than program housing arrangements.

**Childcare and schooling:** Enrolling dependent children in local schools may be complicated to arrange, particularly where the local language is not spoken by the child; you may also have to pay fees, even for public schools. Other issues include academic calendar differences between the GEO program and the local schools, and differences in teaching styles. Childcare issues may include difficulties with finding English-speaking caregivers, costs, and cultural differences.

**Finances:** Dependent(s) should not count on being able to work while abroad, as this is typically not legally possible.

### **How dependents will spend their**

**time:** Consider how your dependent(s) will spend time while you are in class, especially if there is a language barrier. Dependent(s) who are not formally enrolled in the program may not enroll in program classes. Students who wish their dependents to participate in other program activities (orientation, social and cultural activities, excursions, etc.) may request permission for participation in advance.

**Immigration requirements:** Obtaining visas for minor children, especially if accompanied by only one parent, may require additional steps and processes. Dependent spouses and partners may not be able to obtain legal permission to accompany the student for the entire period of the program.

Another option is to study abroad for a shorter duration. A 2-4 week program will allow you to have an international experience and require less time away from your family.



### **Will my VA benefits cover study abroad?**

The VA does cover study abroad in certain circumstances. We suggest you visit with your VA financial counselor to go over your specific situation. However, some information in regards to study abroad is listed below. The amount VA pays is determined by Active Duty service time of the sponsor and can range from 40 percent to 100 percent of the authorized tuition and fee amount. VA can pay tuition that is applied to an approved institution and its degree programs so long as the courses apply toward degree progression, but you must factor out any unauthorized charges, such as airfare, etc., in your cost breakdown. VA cannot currently pay third-party providers, either directly or indirectly using the school as a pass through.

VA can either pay typical academic fees if the student is eligible to use VA benefits, or, if the program is not only applicable toward degree progression, but is also a required part of the program that the student must participate in, additional fees may be able to be included. If a foreign institution is billing the student directly, the foreign institution must have a School Certifying Official and VA approval of its program, and submit the certification to the VA using "guest student" status and with a drop down statement that says "Courses confirmed to apply to a degree program at [the home institution]."


If the student is pursuing a degree program at a foreign school, then that program has to be approved by VA and the foreign school would submit the certification, if a School Certifying Official has been established at that school. In order for a foreign school to have its degree program approved by the VA, there has to be a VA-eligible student looking to participate in the degree program. VA will not approve a program without an interested student trying to participate in the program

### **Is study abroad reasonable for students who want to transfer to a 4-year university?**

Due to UC Berkeley's close proximity and outstanding reputation, it is considered a sought after transfer school by PCCD students. In their holistic review of student documents during the admission process, UC Berkeley highly values personal qualities of the applicant, including leadership ability, character, motivation, insight, tenacity, initiative, originality, intellectual independence, responsibility, maturity, and demonstrated concern for others and for the community are considered. Additionally, they put an emphasis on likely contributions to the intellectual and cultural vitality of the campus. Supplementary to a broad range of intellectual interests and achievements, admission readers seek diversity in personal background and experience. These prized characteristics are transferable to all schools, not limited to UC Berkeley. They can be earned and demonstrated when a student studies abroad and is able to articulate the value of the experience. PCCD students can and should earn an edge to their transcript by setting themselves apart and obtaining an international education!



# NEXT STEPS



Now that you've decided that study abroad is right for you, the next step is to read the *Program Selection, Finances and Application Handbook* to begin your program search.

Don't forget to sign up for our Study Abroad Newsletter and attend our annual Study Abroad Fair to stay up-to-date on all of our study abroad offers!

Learn more at:  
[www.peralta.edu/international/study-abroad](http://www.peralta.edu/international/study-abroad)

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