



# Tips for Developing a Successful Study Abroad Program

The ideal planning time for a program is 12-18 months out from the term for which you are proposing. Here are a few considerations to get you started.

## Program Logistics

Can you follow through on your responsibilities as a program leader?

- If you haven't led a group of students overseas before, give serious consideration to whether or not you are up to the challenge. Your duties as Program Leader of a study abroad program stretch beyond those of professor - you will be a recruiter, administrator, financial manager, institutional representative, advisor, facilitator and crisis manager.
- Generally, the Global Education Approval Committee does not recommend that you choose a program location that you are not familiar with yourself. Alternatively, you need to have established local networks in-country to gain that expertise when the program leader does not have familiarity with the site(s). Program leaders should, ideally, be familiar with the social, economic, and political environment as well as the local customs of the location(s).
- Visit the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs website at <http://travel.state.gov> and review the U.S. Department of State's travel advisory information for your intended program location(s). You should also visit this site to gather country-specific information on security, health and safety issues, international travel, travel alerts and travel warnings, international travel safety for students, and more.
- Consult CDC Travel Health Notices at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/> for your intended program location(s).
- For more information and guidance regarding health and safety considerations at your program's intended site(s), contact GEO's Assistant Director for Global Safety and Risk Management.
- You may want to consider using a third-party custom program provider who can offer you 24/7 program support and take care of the logistical and local lodging and travel arrangements on-site, especially if you are a first-time Program Leader. The Global Education Office can provide you with a list of suggested providers and help you solicit program proposals and price quotes.
- You may want to consider hosting your faculty-led program at one of Virginia Tech's partner institutions. Consult the Global Education Office website for an active list.

Can the program attract a sufficient number of participants?

- If this is a new program and/or if you have never run a Virginia Tech faculty-led study abroad program before, recruiting a minimum number of participants can be challenging. Depending on budget and compensation rates or College policy, the standard minimum enrollment is 10. For every 15 participants, an additional program leader is required.
- Ask yourself the following questions that will help guide program design, alignment with curriculum, and an effective recruitment strategy:

- What is the core educational purpose of the program? What student populations are served? To what majors/degrees and minors is program content applicable? What Pathways or Destination Area requirements will it fulfill? If there are similar programs available on campus or abroad, how is this program distinct and what is its added value? How does/do the selected site(s) add relevance or value to the programmatic objectives and targeted skills? What advising resources are available to students to help them determine if the program will serve their educational goals?
- The Global Education Office can consult on recruitment strategies to help you reach target enrollment. The recruitment of VT students to the program is the responsibility of both the Program Leader and GEO, but takes considerable investment by the Program Leader to achieve success.

Can the program be offered at a reasonable cost that is not prohibitive for students?

- For some programs, visits to multiple destinations/countries may be necessary. However, keep in mind that traveling from place to place (by plane, coach, or train) can be very expensive and difficult to coordinate. Participants should not be expected to spend excessive time on buses, planes, and trains getting to the next place. Be intentional about how you plan your itinerary.
- The excursions you plan will have an impact on the overall cost of the program. Ask yourself if the added value to the course content is worth cost of getting to a particular site.
- Consider whether you are traveling during high or low season and how this will affect program costs.
- Consider how working with a third-party custom program provider will factor in to the budget based on the services they are offering. Will they cover faculty costs if the program secures a certain level of enrollment? Are they charging administrative or overhead costs? Is there a savings due to group bookings?
- Note that study abroad travel differs from business travel. Full government per diem rates do not apply and all arrangements should be at economy rates. Faculty costs should mirror student costs.
- When arranging lodging, consider the following:
  - Will faculty housing be complimentary? Will you be housed in the same place as your students?
  - If students will be staying in student residences (dorms), are there cooking facilities available? Is bedding provided (sheets, towels, etc.)? Is there a cafeteria? If so, approximately how much do meals cost? Or, will some of the meals be covered in the lodging costs? Are bathrooms private or shared? Is there a laundry facility available in-house or close by? Is there Wi-Fi Internet access in the rooms or in the building? Is there a supplemental charge for internet service?
- Consider the availability of cell service and costs. Should students purchase inexpensive phones abroad or use their own phones with an international plan? Are there apps that will allow students to communicate with family and friends for free (Whats App, Skype, Viber, etc.)? Will your cell phone work abroad, or will you need to make alternative arrangements? What will your communication plan be with students?
- Will your program require classroom space? Do you have university contacts in the host country who might be able to help you acquire space for free or at a reduced rate?
- Will you arrange for arrival and departure transportation to and from airports?
- Are there visa fees or required immunizations?
- What's the standard flight expense to reach your country destination?
- What's the currency conversion rate and how might this factor into containing costs?

## Academic Components

Are the content and delivery of the course(s) enhanced by the international location?

How does/do the selected site(s) add relevance or value to the programmatic objectives and targeted skills?

- The goal of global education is to help participants engage in their learning within the context of the culture they will be in while abroad. Program activities should relate to your discipline as well as to the program's course content.

How many credits will you offer on your program?

- The length of your program should correspond with the number of credit hours that you will be offering.
- The student workload and course activities should be designed to full fill the required number of contact hours. Study abroad is highly experiential. Students will be engaged in the program for longer periods of time than they normally would be back in Virginia - not necessarily in the classroom, but on buses, field trips, excursions, site visits, and experiencing and engaging with the local culture.

What's included in a study abroad course syllabus?

- The number of contact hours and number of credits for the course
- A description of how the student workload and activities translate into the number of credits earned
- Specific learning objectives, including those for experiential learning components
- The course assessment mechanisms and grading system, as they relate to both academic and experiential learning outcomes
- A statement of student behavior expectations, both personal and academic, including a clear, fair, and ethical policy regarding consequences of conduct violations
- A description of global skills that students are expected to develop (e.g., language, intercultural competence skills) and how these will be assessed
- Any pre- and/or post-program requirements that support students in culminating learning and synthesizing their study abroad experience, and how these will be assessed

A 6 credits vs 3 credit summer program:

- A 6-credit program qualifies student to apply for summer financial aid from a credit standpoint. It also provides a "healthier" tuition revenue that gives you more resources to cover faculty compensation.
- A 3-credit program does not qualify students to apply for summer financial aid from a credit standpoint. However, given that tuition is charges per credit hour during the summer session, a 3 – credit program is less expensive.
- Summer program duration abroad and start and end dates are important. Contact hours must be met and balanced with affordability and pedagogical goals. Summer Session II programs compete more heavily with internships and paid summer work opportunities.

Academic units have the final say regarding course offerings and course content.

When designing your course (if it will be a new one) or re-purposing an existing Virginia Tech course, capitalize on the fact that you will be abroad.

- Choose course topics that appeal to a wider audience or are particularly relevant due to international or pop culture news coverage. (Ex., a Geosciences program that studies in the Swiss Alps and visits Mount Vesuvius or a political science program to Brussels that focuses on the European Union.)
- Use your professional network to make connections or gain entry to cultural sites for students.
- Build in experiential components. Instead of only lecturing about a particular topic, can you take the students on a field trip that will illustrate first-hand the points that you are conveying? Sometimes actually experiencing something viscerally is more powerful than words. Take advantage of your location to make the course material even more impactful for students.
- Incorporate observation and reflection into your course activities and student deliverables.
- Consider including “compare and contrast” exercises that prompt the students to analyze what they are learning and observing about the host culture in relation to their own culture.
- Make deeper connections and give students opportunities to dig below the surface level of what they are experiencing on site. (Ex., a Food & Culture program in the United Kingdom that looks at the importance of food and how British imperialism influenced British food and even the royal botanical gardens.)

To make your program more attractive to students, offer courses that do the following:

- Fulfill VT Pathways to General Education requirements (for more info on the VT General Education requirements, please click here: <https://www.pathways.prov.vt.edu/> ). This will attract students across the University and not just from your discipline.
- Fulfill college or school, major/minor, or certificate requirements.
- Study Abroad or Experiential Learning 3954/5954 course credit is possible for any discipline and sometimes the only option, but it is not always immediately obvious to students how the credit will work with their program of study. Paint this picture for them in your marketing materials, class talks, info sessions, and orientation meetings. Focus on global skill development and other outcomes of course participation.

Use study abroad coursework to solve problems:

- Are there required or popular courses that your academic unit offers that are enrollment capped and difficult for student to get into? If so, consider offering an abroad option.
- Do you already offer a campus course focused on global learning or cultural phenomena, consider offering it abroad.

## Timeline and Program Development

- See the Faculty-Led Programs section of Global Education’s website: [www.globaleducation.vt.edu](http://www.globaleducation.vt.edu) for program timelines specific to your program’s term as well as program proposal deadlines.
- For new programs, it can be beneficial to conduct a site visit to inform these considerations and solidify your program’s design. The GEO offers New Program Development Grants every semester. See website for more information.