
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

1.1. Assessing Interest

Before selecting a program site and starting work on program development, it is important to assess the amount of interest among the student population. There are clear patterns of student preference, with destinations in Western Europe by far the most popular. Promoting a program in a geographic or academic area without an existing core of interest is difficult. Through aggressive marketing, it is possible to develop student interest. Please keep in mind that a determined effort and significant preparation time are required.

Some methods of assessing interest include the following:

- Gather evidence from the appropriate departments on the numbers of students enrolling in classes in the subject area or majoring in the subject.
- Determine whether similar programs have been offered at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) or elsewhere. Contact the directors of such programs to determine the enrollment history and any problems encountered.
- Survey students to determine interest.

1.2. Site Selection

The most common reasons for choosing a program site involve academic interest and personal contacts. A contact at an institution, however, is not reason enough to launch a study abroad program. Consider the following questions:

- Is there a valid reason for taking a group of students to a particular site?
- Will the environment contribute to the program's course offerings? In other words, does the location contribute to the learning experience in ways that could not be duplicated by the students who stayed at home?
- Will the site compete with any existing SFA programs?
- Does the city offer enough sites to occupy and enrich students' free time? Ideally, the city should provide convenient access to a wide range of sites.
- What is the cost of living? Sometimes staying in large cities is much more expensive for students than staying in small-medium size places. Also, some countries are extremely expensive compared to the U.S. and excessive costs will deter students from participating.
- Will the city host a major event, such as the World Cup Soccer final or the

- Olympics? This would probably increase the cost of the program due to difficulties in securing housing and transportation and would certainly make it more difficult for students to delve into the local culture.
- Are Americans welcome in the city/country? The city need not roll out the red carpet, but if the locals harbor a significant grievance that manifests itself when dealing with Americans, students will be unhappy and will not be able to move beyond the hostility to learn objectively about the host culture.
 - Is the region stable enough to ensure the safety of the students? If a politically or otherwise volatile region is chosen for the site, extra attention must be paid to safety concerns.
 - Check the SFA International Travel webpage for information on Prohibited and Restricted Travel Areas, and links to Travel Health Notices and Travel Advisories:
 - <https://www.sfasu.edu/procurement-business-services/pay/travel/international>.

1.3. Program Models

Program Models Faculty-Led Study Abroad programs vary widely in terms of program itineraries, academic focus, duration, inclusions, and scope. The program might be a course taught almost entirely abroad with a small number of meetings or assignments prior to departure or upon return. Or, it might feature a short overseas component embedded in a larger course taught on the SFA campus during the regular term.

Academic delivery can also take on many forms including: faculty members teaching in a classroom space and/or on-site (museum, cultural locale); lectures by guest speakers and local experts; classes taught by faculty not employed by SFA (language institute or host institution); service-learning components integrating community service with guided instruction and reflection by the faculty member or contracted local instructor; research components or projects; third-party vendors, and language acquisition.

Logistics for the program will be arranged by the on-site provider contracted by SFA in collaboration with the Faculty Leader. The group may stay in one location for the duration of the program, possibly with day or weekend trips further afield, or travel within one or more cities or countries. Accommodations might include hotels, youth hostels, apartments, university housing, host families, or even camping. Most programs include only group welcome and farewell dinners, but others may include most or all meals depending on the location. In-country transportation options range from public (metro, bus, train) to walking. Programs typically include airport pick-up and drop-off.

1.4. Program course

The courses associated with the program can range from existing SFA courses with student learning goals and assignments adjusted to reflect and incorporate location (these could be specific courses, special topics, or travel study designations) to the development of new courses. Courses offered abroad must be of comparable academic rigor to those offered on-campus. Leading a Study Abroad program allows faculty to explore alternate teaching pedagogies and practices offering opportunities to think outside of the box.

Courses taught abroad should have the same number of contact hours as on-campus courses. If a program's duration is less than a regular academic semester, students will have to attend courses more often than if on campus. However, the calculation of “contact hours” can include site visits and other cultural activities not typically elements of on-campus courses. Accommodating both the need for cultural immersion and the required number of course contact hours takes creative scheduling. It is good practice to make excursions a required part of coursework to ensure that students will take full advantage of those experiences. It is not uncommon for faculty leaders to schedule longer class times during the week in order to accommodate a weekend excursion. Deadlines and expectations for assignments regarding field trips—whether these assignments are journals, reports, or major papers—should be clearly explained to students and included in the course syllabus.

Students must remain in good academic standing during the term prior to their study abroad experience. Students not in good academic standing may be disqualified from participation. Students on probation may be allowed to study abroad, pending the approval of their college dean. Students on academic suspension may not participate in study abroad. Any funds paid toward the program costs will be forfeited.

Faculty leaders must give students a course syllabus, required reading list, and the initial homework assignment prior to departure to enable them an opportunity to prepare in advance.

For legal reasons, no one other than SFA faculty, students, and staff are allowed to participate in any study abroad program unless they are receiving academic credit. A faculty member may bring a spouse, but such individuals cannot be treated as a program participant and no fees related to these individuals can be channeled through SFA.