

Creating Access: Study Abroad

TS
Tip Sheet

Overview

Study abroad experiences broaden students' horizons, providing them with exposure to other cultures and languages. In today's global marketplace these experiences often increase a person's employability. Deaf students, like their hearing peers, are increasingly seeking out these opportunities to expand their repertoire of marketable skills.

Are institutions required to provide accommodations for students in study abroad programs?

The answer to this question is complicated at best. As a service, program, or activity sponsored by the college, a study abroad program falls within the mandates of both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. However, case law and Office of Civil Rights decisions are vague. The following questions factor into the decision-making process:

- From where does the program originate—is the sponsoring entity an American institution or a foreign institution or program?
- What is the purpose of the program—is it a graduation requirement or an extracurricular activity sponsored by an outside entity?
- In the event that the student is required to apply to an out-of-country institution, who is requiring it—the American institution or the out-of-country institution?

Although it is not clear whether the ADA and Section 504 apply to programs that take place outside of the United States, institutions that administer study abroad programs should make decisions about accommodations with the presumption that these laws apply.

What is the first step in planning for study abroad?

Plan early!

Planning early gives everyone time to address concerns, work out details, and acquire funding to make study abroad a success for everyone. Because each study abroad program is unique, there are no best practices for planning accommodations. How accommodations are determined at the home institution should be helpful in guiding how accommodations are determined abroad.

Based on the student's required accommodations, the student, the disability office, and the study abroad office should work together to determine the following:

- Who is responsible for investigating and providing assistive listening devices that will work outside the United States?
- What will the interpreter or speech-to-text service provider's contract include? Should travel time, meals, and transportation be covered? Should the provider be paid an hourly or flat fee?
- Will a team of providers be needed?
- How will accommodations for social activities and other after-hours activities be handled?



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Study Abroad: From Theory Into Practice

China, Thailand, Germany, and South Africa are some of the countries to which deaf students have already journeyed as part of study abroad programs. For each study abroad program, accommodations were handled differently by considering local interpreting resources, available technology, and the nature of the courses. The following are examples of how institutions have implemented accommodations:

- Sending a team of university interpreters to South Africa due to the technical nature of material and lack of local interpreting resources
- Sending one university interpreter and contracting with one local interpreter for a trip to Iceland
- Contracting with a team of local interpreters for providing on-site accommodations
- Sending a CART provider from the university's home area
- Providing the student with carbon paper so peers could take notes for the student during lectures

Recent trends suggest that employers value candidates who are strong in both traditional workplace values and intercultural values. As such, students with academic experiences beyond U.S. borders boast a repertoire of marketable skills unlike their stay-at-home peers. Study abroad experience can give a new college graduate an advantage in a very competitive hiring environment.

Much like their hearing peers, deaf students who have engaged in study abroad programs experience enhanced communication abilities, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, and self-awareness.

Related Resources

- Mobility International USA:
www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/deafaccommodations
- National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA) Notes:
Federal Disability Laws: Do They Translate to Study Abroad Programs?:
www.calstate.edu/gc/documents/NACUANOTES10.pdf



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Additional resources can be found at www.nationaldeafcenter.org