Application to Establish a Study Abroad Program: Instructions and Explanations

Faculty members wishing to begin a study abroad program at Gordon State College have two options: to build their own from the ground up or to work with an established program at Gordon or at a similar institution. Applications for summer or spring programs must be submitted by the mid-point of the previous fall semester; applications for fall programs must be submitted by the mid-point of the previous spring semester.

Unless the host country is English-speaking, a minimal language requirement must be part of any Gordon study abroad program, whether independent or affiliated with another program. Unless the language is one taught at Gordon, the director must include some type of language instruction other than traditional classroom instruction. Below are some suggestions:

Hold a series of meetings where someone who speaks the target language instructs students in the basics of survival language: e.g., “Hello/good day.” “Where is the bathroom?” “How much does this cost?” “I’m lost.” Students should have an attendance requirement for those meetings.

Find an online site with some instruction in the language. Gordon’s foreign language faculty would be able to help with that.

Hire a native speaker at the study abroad site to give students the basics of survival language for 30 minutes or so a day on three or four occasions.

A minimal cultural requirement must also be a part of any Gordon study abroad program. While you might conclude that your students would have meaningful cultural experiences simply by being in the country, American students have been known to spend their days on the beach and their nights at clubs that cater to tourists and eat at McDonald’s. How will you ensure that students do, in fact, experience the target culture? Homestays are strongly encouraged, although not usually practical for non-language programs. A local English language school would be delighted to have American students help their students practice English. Students can be sent on a mission to find certain objects—a type of food, laundry detergent, the signature of an English-speaking person, etc. There should be visits to local sites of interest—the Eiffel Tower, the Parthenon, the Taj Mahal, etc.—but to experience the culture in a meaningful way, students need to interact with the people of the country. Monolingual instructors need to be aware--and make students aware—that communication involves much more than language skills, and being unable to speak more than a few words of the local language does not mean a total inability to communicate with the locals.

 In this day of online classes, the definition of “contact hours” has become quite flexible. Nevertheless, for the integrity of your program, you need 37.5 hours of contact/instruction per 3-hour class, the number of contact hours in a 3-hour on-campus class. Those hours need not be in an onsite classroom. They can be cultural site visits for which the student must present some sort of work (a report, for example) or that involves a discussion that shows the student was engaged in the visit. They can involve work that the student does before departure. They can involve films that are in some way specific to the culture (e.g., “Dumb and Dumber” in Spanish for a Spanish language program would be fine, but in English as part of a theater program in Greece, it would be totally irrelevant). Depending on the course, even time spent speaking English with a native who is learning English could count as contact hours. In short, there must be at least 37.5 hours of demonstrable teaching/learning. However, on the application, you are not expected to account for those hours one by one but rather give an outline of the approximate number of hours in class, the approximate number of hours at cultural sites, etc.

Some courses have requirements that are part of the course but not part of the grade. For example, many professors have an attendance policy. Students receive no grade for attending class, but they are penalized for excessive absences. With study abroad programs, it may be that participation in certain excursions is mandatory but isn’t included in the grade. You need to indicate on the application, as well as in your syllabus, what these requirements are and what the penalty for non-compliance is.

Study abroad directors may require participants to adhere to U.S. law or to local law. Obviously, students are not free to break local law, but, for example, if local law allows drinking at age 18, directors are allowed to set the age at 21, since that is the U.S. legal drinking age. On the International Studies Council website, you will find the Gordon State College Code of Conduct edited for study abroad, and you must require students to read it and sign to indicate that they have done so. However, you should also include on your student application any other rules/expectations. You will find the student application for study abroad on the International Studies Council website, but you may add your rules/expectations and adapt the application for your program. You should discuss your proposed program with other directors who have led programs abroad and try to anticipate any problems that may be peculiar to your location. For example, if you use homestays, students need to know that they cannot invite friends to the home. If local instructors teach the courses, you may need to specify the type of behavior that is expected in class. Students need to be aware of all expectations and penalties.

The syllabus/syllabi you are required to attach to the application form need not be detailed. You must include at least a course description, objectives, requirements, and grading. Your grading scale and the basis for grades must be clear. Students sometimes think that just going on a study abroad program guarantees them an A, so you need to make them aware that in a study abroad class, just like in any class, there are different requirements for A, B, etc.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any member of Gordon State College’s International Studies Council.