



# Top Tips: Education Abroad Advising for First-Gen College Students

First-generation college students may be primarily focused on completing their degrees and may not have imagined study abroad as part of their college experience, or they might have priorities and responsibilities that discourage them from considering opportunities abroad. For those who do pursue education abroad, some may require additional advising and support to overcome challenges throughout the process and while overseas, including finances, family support, academic approval timelines, or even the application process itself.

Drawing on Diversity Abroad's Access, Inclusion, Diversity, & Equity (AIDE) in International Education Roadmap guideline on Student Advising, the 2017-2018 task force on First-Generation College Students and First Abroad offers some advising tips and best practices to support access to education abroad for first-generation college students.

1

**Begin planning with advisees early.** Students should ideally begin researching programs early in their academic careers to allow for as much flexibility as possible with planning. Work with students to explore the range of options for studying abroad that may best fit with their academic, financial, personal, and even professional goals. Encourage students to consider programs that offer major, minor, and general education/core curriculum credits.

Help students develop a study abroad plan that addresses any non-academic responsibilities that they may have. It might not be enough to point first-generation students to a list of programs or websites they should explore. With so many types of education abroad opportunities and program models, knowing where to start can be overwhelming for anyone! Consider setting aside time to sit with the student and navigate program websites or catalogs together. Let them watch you click on various links or thumb through pages to find the information they need about requirements, costs, pre-departure considerations, and deadlines. Show them how to organize their search, and help them identify specific information they need to bring back to their academic advisor to start a conversation about earning curriculum credits. Explain in detail what the course equivalency or credit transfer process looks like, and invite students to come back and connect with you anytime they have additional questions arise in their planning process.

2

**Think beyond access: Cost does not always equal value.** When helping first-generation students identify study abroad programs, consider the support students might need while abroad, not only the financial implications. Cost is certainly an important consideration in choosing a program, but underserved students who may require more guidance and administrative support are often channeled into lower-cost programs, which might offer minimal on-site support and require students to be extremely self-sufficient. While these programs may be a good fit for some students, others may not be equipped to navigate study abroad that independently. It is important to help students identify what might help them have a successful experience abroad.

Avoid applying your own assumptions, and work with the student to understand their needs and expectations while abroad. Ask: Does this student understand the array of opportunities available? Will this program serve this student's needs in ways more complex than simply cost? Is there a lower-cost program that will provide them with adequate support?

# 3

**Ensure study abroad will not interfere with graduating on time.** Students who are the first in their family to attend college may not be able to consider delaying graduation in order to study abroad. Academic and study abroad advisors play a critical role in ensuring that students interested in studying abroad will still be able to graduate on time. Advisors can help prospective study abroad students by offering strategies for timely graduation, such as:

- **Consider the student's discipline or major.** Consult with your institution's study abroad office, the student's academic department(s), and/or academic advisors to identify programs that are recommended for the student's major or will satisfy degree requirements. Learn as much as you can about the study abroad office or departmental curriculum integration efforts, which can help ensure timely graduation.
- **Assist students in identifying study abroad opportunities that will keep them on track toward graduation.** Discuss an ideal year, semester, or summer to study abroad, and work with the student to identify major requirements or course sequences on campus that can inform study abroad planning. Work with students to understand which programs will fit into their academic plan.
- **Facilitate the pre-approval process.** Understand how, when, and by whom all of a student's study abroad courses should be pre-approved prior to departure, and help the student prioritize next steps.

# 4

**Support students in developing a financial plan.** Funding study abroad may be (or at least feel like) a significant hurdle for first-generation college students, who may also depend on financial aid. Students may need additional support to work out a realistic budget and determine any additional funds they will need to cover study abroad expenses. As an advisor, you can:

- **Find out if financial aid is available for study abroad.** Your institution may offer programs that allow a student's regular financial aid to transfer to a study abroad program. Encourage students to contact the financial aid office to find out how to use their aid and/or loans for study abroad.
- **Consider location.** The exchange rate and cost of living in the host country or city can have a significant impact on a student's ability to fund the program & budget for everyday expenses. If possible, help students identify programs in more affordable locations that still meet their academic & other needs.
- **Help students develop a back-up plan for work-study funds.** Make sure students are aware that they cannot earn work-study funds while abroad. If they will be permitted to work in their host country, help them assess the benefits, drawbacks, and limitations of seeking employment while abroad.
- **Work with students to identify and apply for scholarships.** There are study abroad scholarships to support first-generation college students & other underserved populations. [Diversity Abroad](#) has a database, and many colleges, universities, and study abroad organizations offer their own funds. In most cases, students do not need to finalize their study abroad plans before applying for scholarships, & many scholarships have early deadlines, so encourage students to begin looking as early as possible. If a student has to change their study abroad program or term after applying for a scholarship, many will still allow the funds to be applied to the new program.
- **Consider crowdfunding.** Crowdfunding is the process of raising small amounts of money from a large number of people. Some options include [FundMyTravel](#), [GoEnnounce](#), or [gofundme](#).
- **Advise students to look for student discounts.** From flights to health insurance to cultural activities, there are many discounts for students that may result in significant savings, such as [STA Travel](#), [Student Universe](#), [CheapOair](#), [International Student Identity Card](#), [TripSavvy](#), and more.

# 5

**Engage parents/guardians whenever possible.** The people who have raised a first-generation student are often key influencers in a student's decision to study abroad. Since those parents/guardians generally don't have experience with higher education in the United States – let alone with study abroad – they might approach the concept with hesitation or skepticism. As an advisor, it may be helpful for you to:

- Be open to speaking with the parents/guardians directly and answering their questions. A conversation with an “expert” can have a great impact on a parent's level of comfort with or support of study abroad, and ultimately on the student's decision to apply to or participate in their program.
- Ask the student what information their parent or guardian may be seeking. Sometimes language barriers or cultural differences may make a conversation about study abroad difficult. Your student will know what barriers they are facing in regard to parent/guardian concerns. Learn what those are and plan a strategic response in collaboration with the student.
- Prepare responses to common parent concerns. Health and safety are often a top priority; review emergency response protocols of your institution and partner organizations. The same goes for financial advising and graduating on time – parents might have some of the same questions students have.
- Let advisees know that it's ok to bring a parent to an advising session. The opportunity for parents to ask questions directly throughout the process will help ease anxiety and will build trust.
- Host a parent webinar or share a link to one from a partner organization. These resources are a great on-demand reinforcement to the advising you provide. They often cover key concerns like emergency response and academic credibility, and provide an overview of the whole student experience from application to re-entry.
- Invite parents of both returnees and prospective students to an alumni reception. Both parents and students will appreciate hearing a wrap-around first-hand perspective.

# 6

**Identify allies in students' personal lives and on campus who can support them throughout their education abroad journey.** Advisors play a critical role in students' study abroad journey, and should collaborate and form alliances across campus to strengthen the resources available to first-generation college students. Connect with academic advisors, financial aid advisors, diversity and inclusion support professionals, admissions counselors, and peer mentors throughout campus who may have experience working with first-generation college students. These allies can help develop strategies and resources to support students throughout the study abroad process, including pre-departure, while students are overseas, and re-entry. Advisors should also try to go out and meet first generation college students where they are. Take time to connect with campus allies, consider hosting workshops or info sessions in spaces with their allies present, and invite student alumni. Seeing people they already know and trust as allies of study abroad may add legitimacy or boost efforts to encourage first generation college students to consider study abroad opportunities.