Study Abroad 101

You are thinking about studying abroad… and suddenly you have lots and lots of questions that probably “nobody” can answer for you… or at least, that’s what you think! Well, in this brief guide we are going to cover some important topics and answer some your questions… so get ready for your Study Abroad 101.

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9. “I am ready now!”
1. Getting started

Where do I begin?
If you have been thinking about studying abroad, but don’t know where to go, begin by visiting the Office of Study Abroad (OSA); we can provide information about the types of programs we offer, what countries and cities you can go to, what terms you can study abroad, scholarships opportunities, and other relevant information to begin planning your new adventure. The earlier you start this process, the better. To make an appointment with the OSA, please contact us by phone: (806) 651-5309 or by email: studyabroad@wtamu.edu. Our office is located in the SSC, Room 115A (right in front of the HUB).

How do I choose my ideal program?
At your first visit with the OSA, we will show you the best options we can offer based on your interests and major; you can tell us if you have a country or region of preference, and we will try to find a program in that location that fits your major. When debating between some options, we recommend you make your decision based on the course offering, since this experience will ultimately benefit you as a professional. From our point of view, your ideal program will be the one that best matches your degree plan.

Who will approve my program?
Your academic advisor will play a very important role in this process. He or she is the person who will review the course content and make sure that it can be transferred to WT once you return, if successfully completed. By signing the “Pre-Approval of Study Abroad Credit”, your advisor and dean agree to give you academic credit for the courses they approve before you depart. Please be aware that if you choose to change your pre-approved course or courses while you are abroad, we cannot guarantee that you will receive academic credit.

2. Programs Information

What types of study abroad programs are offered at WT?
We offer three different types of study abroad programs: faculty-led, affiliated, and exchange/reciprocal programs; read about them and see which one is the best choice for you!

- Faculty-led programs are courses instructed by WT professors that include a short-term course-related program abroad. These programs are normally developed by the faculty member for a specific major, and academic credit is given only for the courses to be instructed abroad. While in this type of program you won’t be able to choose the location (because the faculty chooses it for you), it is a great choice if you are looking for a short-term experience (normally 2 to 4 weeks); these programs are also convenient if you have never been abroad and do not want to travel by yourself, since you have the opportunity to travel with the faculty members and a group of WT students.

- Affiliated programs are those offered by third-party providers. WT works with several providers that offer programs almost anywhere you can think of. The greatest advantage of these programs is that they offer you a package with several things included, like tuition, housing, some meals, excursions, cultural activities, visa support if needed, advising services on site, among others. These are really convenient if you are looking for a long-term program, or even for internships and service learning experiences. Check out some of the providers we work with!

- Exchange/Reciprocal programs are based on agreements between WT and partners universities in other countries. WT has reciprocal agreements with a few foreign institutions and is currently working to increase the exchange/reciprocal programs portfolio, so you can take advantage of this opportunity as well.

If you would like to receive more information about any of these types of programs, please contact us!
Where can I go?
You can go almost anywhere, as long as it is safe for you. WT students have been to every continent in the world, except only for Antarctica! You could be the first buff in the frozen continent! The possibilities are limitless; if you have a country or region of preference, let us know and we will try to find your program in that location. Sometimes the search is easy, and sometimes is more complicated, but we will certainly consider your interests first. Remember, however, that there are places where it is definitely not safe to go to. If the U.S. Department of State has issued a travel warning for the country you want to visit, the Office of Study Abroad will not approve your program. Also keep in mind that some countries are better for certain majors, and not so much for others; for instance, Australia may be a great destination for Sports, but it may not be the best choice if you want to learn another language.

For how long can I study abroad?
That is completely up to you – and your particular needs and goals, financial resources, as well as the limits placed on you by your academic program at WTAMU. You can go for 2 weeks, a month, a whole summer, semester, or even a year! As mentioned above, faculty-led programs are usually 2-4 weeks long; also, affiliated providers offer intensive month programs! If you prefer to take your experience to the next level by spending an entire semester or year abroad, our third party providers have some great long-term programs for you! The Office of Study Abroad encourages semester and/or year-long programs, mostly because the overall experience will be much more satisfactory if you stay for a longer period – and even cheaper in the long run!

Where am I going to live while I am abroad?
Housing options differ depending on the country and region where you will be studying abroad, the term of your program, and your budget for the program. Some of the popular options are homestays, student residences, and apartments. Homestays may be a good way to immerse yourself in the host country culture, especially if you are studying language. The experience of living with a family can provide insights that other arrangements cannot. However, homestays may be more restrictive in that you will be expected to conform to the rules and norms of the family, which will most likely be different from your own family.

Residence hall housing and apartments are similar to what is offered at WTAMU. You will usually have the option of a roommate or a single room with an additional charge. Most students will share a bathroom, kitchen and “living room.” These are often self-catering arrangements in which students are responsible for buying and preparing their own meals.

3. Requirements

What are the requirements for studying abroad at WTAMU?
To be eligible for a study abroad program with WTAMU, you must meet the following requirements:

- Academic Standing: Applicants for study abroad must be in good academic standing. Your GPA must be at least 2.0, but some programs may require a 3.0 or higher, so review the specific requirements of the program.
- Semester Completion: Students must have completed a minimum of one semester (full-time) at WTAMU and be making progress toward academic requirements as determined by their dean.
- OSA Program approval: the program you choose will have to be approved by the OSA; we must ensure that it meets certain academic and safety and health standards before you go.

What if I don’t meet the requirements?
If you don’t meet the requirements right now, you can still participate, but you probably need to wait for a little while. For example, if your GPA is not high enough, you can postpone the study abroad program one semester or two, and in the meantime, work hard to get your grades up. Same if you were not registered as a full-time student the semester before you want to go abroad; you may want to wait one more semester, and make sure you meet this requirement.
If you are interested in a program that we are unable to approve, either because it does not meet our academic standards or for various health and/or safety concerns, we will try to find another option for you. The OSA needs to do a little bit of research before letting students go on just any study abroad program.

Is a foreign language required for study abroad?
Good news, you do not need to speak another language to study abroad! If you don’t speak another language, there are a few options for you: first, you can choose to go to an English-speaking country. Believe it or not, there are more than 60 countries in the world where English is the official language! Second, you can also try to learn the other country’s language. Many students choose to participate in study abroad programs to actually gain/improve language skills, so this could be your opportunity to become proficient in other language. Third, most of our programs, including faculty-led, reciprocal/exchange and through providers, offer translators to help you get around. So, relax… even if you don’t speak the language, you can still communicate with locals, either in your own language or theirs, or with a little help from a translator!

4. Money Matters

How much does it cost?
Costs vary depending on where you go and for how long. At WTAMU, you can take advantage of an exchange agreement with universities abroad. WTAMU students can study at an international university for essentially the same cost as remaining here. Tuition and fees are paid at here and housing is usually paid for in the host country. Additional expenses include international travel, meals, passports, visas and incidentals, such as travel within the host country or region.

Costs can be similar to staying at WTAMU in countries where the cost of living is significantly less than in the U.S., such as China or Costa Rica. High-cost cities, such as London or Rome, can be substantially more expensive. It’s best to explore many options before deciding which program you’d like to join.

How am I going to pay for my study abroad program?
There are some options for funding your study abroad program, but the truth is that some portion will probably have to come out of your pocket. It is a good idea to start saving some money and finding some scholarships and other financial resources you think are available to you, even if you think it’s too early for that.

The OSA offers the International Education Fee Scholarship (IEFS) to all students that participate in our study abroad programs. This scholarship is granted based on GPA, Financial need, and the type of program that you will be participating.

What are the requirements for the IEF scholarship?
To qualify for the IEFS, you must meet the following requirements:

- Have a cumulative GPA of at least 2.5
- Be a full-time student the semester before you plan on going abroad
- Participate in a study abroad program approved by our office.

What about Financial Aid?
Most grants and loans you receive can be used to pay for your study abroad program. We work closely with Financial Aid to determine how much you can receive. For additional information, make sure you contact Charissa Harden in the Financial Aid Office by phone: (806) 651-2058, or by email: charden@wtamu.edu

What other options do I have?
In addition, there are other resources that can help you finance your study abroad, for example:
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- Nationally Competitive Scholarships: These big scholarships are competitive, as the name implies. Sometimes they are specific to a region, major, etc. You will be competing with other students across the U.S., so you need to have a good GPA. There are some other requirements like being a Pell Grant recipient. Contact the Nationally Competitive Scholarships Coordinator, Laura Seals, for additional information, by phone: (806) 651-2587, or by email: ncs@wtamu.edu or lseals@wtamu.edu
- Attebury Honors Program Scholarships: If you have been a member in good standing with the Honors Program for at least 12 months, you may qualify for additional support through the Attebury Honors Program. Please contact them for additional information, by phone: (806) 651-2734, or by email: honors.program@wtamu.edu
- Providers Scholarships: If you are participating in a program with one of our affiliated providers, you may also be able to get some scholarships through them. Make sure you meet their specific requirements and apply to the scholarships you are eligible for.

5. Documents

How do I get a passport?
To apply for a passport, you need to fill out the Form DSP-11, available in the U.S. Department of State website. Search the database of more than 4,500 locations nationwide to submit your application or renewal, or make an appointment with the post office in Canyon or any post office in Amarillo.

Please DO NOT sign the application form until you meet with the official at the post office - they must witness your signature.

You will need the following at your appointment:

- Application printed but not signed.
- Certified copy of your birth certificate (can be purchased at the county court house if you were born in Texas).
- Driver’s license or state-issued identification with picture.
- Two recent, identical photographs. These must be 2” by 2” and meet the specifications for official passport photos (snapshots generally do not work). You can purchase these photos at a number of places like Walgreens, CVS pharmacy or directly at the post office.
- Social security number (you will not need your card).
- Address, birth date and place of birth, parents’ birth date and place of birth and spouse’s birth date and place of birth.
- Payment for your passport will range depending on whether you request standard or expedited processing.

If you already have a passport, remember that it must be valid for at least six months after the date of departure. For information on renewing your passport, please see the next paragraph.

How do I renew my passport?
To renew your passport, you will need the form DSP-82 (also available on the U.S. Department of State website). You can renew by mail if:

- Your passport was issued within the last 15 years
- You were more than 16 years of age when it was issued
- Your name is the same as it reads on the passport
- If you do not meet these requirements, you must apply in person using the steps outlined above.
How do I know if I need a Visa?
Depending on your country of origin, country of destination and length of stay, you may be required to obtain a Visa. You can find out by visiting the Consulate General of the country you plan to visit. For more information on obtaining a Visa, please visit www.travel.state.gov. Then you can select your country of destination and see the Entry/Exit Requirements for U.S. Citizens. If you are not a U.S. Citizen, we will need to search the requirements for your country of origin. The OSA and the International Students Office can provide help in finding out! Also, most providers offer Visa support; thus, if you are going on their programs, they can assist you in getting a Visa as well.

What other documents do I need?
If you are an U.S. Citizen, your passport book and visa (if required) should be enough to get you out of the country, and back. However, rules differ for U.S. residents and International students. For U.S. Residents, a Green Card will be necessary when traveling, and for International Students, the I-94 and I-20 are required for re-entry to the U.S.

DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients can also participate in study abroad programs. In order to do so, it is highly recommended that you contact an immigration attorney to help you fill out the appropriate documentation, obtain a special permission to leave the country called “Advanced Parole” and ensure that you can re-entry the U.S. For additional information, please contact the OSA.

6. How to apply

How do I apply for a program with a provider?
Once you have chosen a program, have determined your finances, and obtained your advisor’s approval, you are ready to apply for your program. Each program provider has its own application process and deadlines. You should be able to easily find this application on the website of the program you are going to be doing. Please remember that most providers will ask you to make an initial deposit at the time that you apply, so make sure to have a credit or debit card at hand.

How do I apply for a faculty-led program?
The application process for our faculty-led programs is also different from one to another. In some cases, the faculty will handle most of the process, while in other cases the OSA will handle the applications. Depending on the program you select, the OSA or the program leader will be able to guide you in the right direction so you can meet the application deadline.

If I decide not to go, are program fees refundable?
Normally, each provider and faculty leader will set specific deadlines for payments, and in many cases, your initial deposit may be refundable; after certain date, you can probably be refunded 50%, more or less, depending on the program rules. It is very important that you think carefully about your program and make a serious decision before you make any payments, as there is a chance that you will lose money if you change your mind too late.

7. Health and Safety

Our responsibility
The OSA takes safety and health very seriously. We are constantly working on procedures that will help us mitigate, respond and react to any health and safety emergency situations. For example, we will not allow a student to go on a study abroad program to a country where there is a travel warning issued by the U.S. Department of State. Our goal is to make your experience as safe as possible and be prepared for unexpected situations.
Although every effort will be taken to ensure students’ safety while abroad, WTAMU cannot plan or take responsibility for circumstances beyond its control. Ultimately, it is the student’s responsibility to ensure their own personal safety and make choices that will not put themselves in danger while they are abroad.

**Pre-Departure Orientation**

All students participating in an OSA approved study abroad program (faculty-led, reciprocal, affiliated, individual study) must attend a pre-departure orientation prior to their departure. The OSA will inform students of the date and time of these pre-departure orientations. If for any reason the student does not attend a pre-departure orientation, they will not be eligible to participate in the study abroad program.

Some of the topics covered (although not exclusive) in the pre-departure orientation are:

- General recommendations
- Documents
- Insurance
- Travel regulations
- Packing
- Money
- Flight, arrival and jet lag
- Culture shock
- Homestay suggestions
- Academic responsibility
- Phone calls
- Health and Safety
- In case of an emergency
- Standards of conduct

If you would like to look into safety and health information on your own, please refer to the websites listed below:

- **Department of State Travel:** [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- **World Health Organization:** [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

**Emergency and Liability Forms**

All students participating in an OSA approved study abroad program must review the Terms of Participation which outlines students responsibility while participating in a study abroad program, and includes an acceptance form, FERPA Waiver, Waiver of Liability Form (with listed witness), Medical Consent & Emergency Contact Form, and Verification of Insurance. This is completed prior to studying abroad. Students will not be eligible to study abroad if these forms have not been completed and returned to the OSA prior to departure. To access emergency and liability forms, please go to the Forms page.

**Insurance**

All students studying abroad are **required** to have health and medical insurance for the duration of their time abroad. Most Affiliated program providers will offer health insurance in their program fees; the OSA and Risk Management will review the coverage offered by the provider to determine if the policy meets our minimum standards of coverage.

All WTAMU students on faculty-led study abroad programs are required to have Health and Travel Insurance through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI). This insurance will be purchased through your program fees. For information on coverage please see the brochure at CISI.
Emergency Situations
Students and faculty should contact the OSA with emergencies at +1 806-651-5309 during office hours. The OSA will work with students, whether it be an evacuation, medical assistance, or any other type of emergency. If it is after hours, please contact the University Police Department at +1 806-651-2300.

8. FAQ

What does WT expect from me if I participate in a study abroad program?
While you are abroad, the WTAMU Code of Student Life applies, so WT expects the same behavior and academic results even if you are miles away from campus. We want you to enjoy your experience abroad, but always remembering that you are an Ambassador of West Texas A&M University and the impression you give to others about yourself will also be the image they create of WT.

Will I have to delay graduation?
Not necessarily. With planning, you can remain on track to graduate in four years and still study abroad for up to a year. Plan early and work closely with your college, academic advisers and study abroad coordinator to design the best course of study. Some find it best to remain at WTAMU for an extra semester or year after studying abroad because of the new focus they gained overseas. Your own circumstances and needs will determine the best course of action for you.

Will this matter… in my future?
If you are wondering whether a study abroad program will matter to your future employer or grad school or not, the answer is “yes”. Nowadays, employers look for international experience when hiring, and it will also represent a competitive advantage for you if you are thinking about graduate school. There are uncountable skills that develop as a consequence of studying abroad. This type of experience will have a huge positive impact not only in your life, but also on your resume!

9. “I am ready now!”
Excellent! Come by our office and let’s get you started! If you can think of any other questions, bring them to us and we will be happy to find the answers for you!