

Advancing Equity in Educational Opportunity Since 1981

*ADVANCING  
INTERNATIONAL  
ACCESS: THE  
ULTIMATE GUIDE TO  
STUDY ABROAD*  
**FOR TRIO  
PERSONNEL**

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# **ADVANCING INTERNATIONAL ACCESS: A GUIDE TO SUPPORT STUDENT STUDY ABROAD FOR TRIO STAFF**



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# WELCOME

As the president of the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE), I am honored to introduce this comprehensive study abroad toolkit designed to empower low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities to explore the world beyond their borders. At COE, our mission is clear: to achieve college access and success for those who have historically faced barriers to higher education.

Since our inception in 1981, COE has been at the forefront of advocating for educational equity and opportunity. We pioneered the term "first-generation" as part of the TRIO legislation, and our commitment to serving low-income students and those with disabilities remains unwavering. With a membership of over 1,000 colleges and agencies across the United States and its territories, COE is dedicated to ensuring that every individual has the chance to pursue and complete a college education.

The journey toward educational equity extends far beyond the confines of our communities. Recognizing the transformative power of international experiences, COE embarked on a mission to integrate study-abroad opportunities into the lives of TRIO participants. Through partnerships with universities and organizations worldwide, we have opened doors to destinations from Mexico to South Africa and the United Kingdom to Spain and the Netherlands.

Our dedication to international education is grounded in the belief that exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives enriches students' lives and enhances their academic and professional endeavors. Through study abroad programs, TRIO participants engage in immersive learning experiences, fostering cross-cultural understanding and developing invaluable skills for success in today's globalized society. I am deeply grateful to Keith Sherin, former senior vice president and chief financial officer of General Electric, whose generous support has made the COE study abroad programming possible. With great pride, we honor Mr. Sherin's commitment by naming our initiatives the Keith Sherin Global Leaders Study Abroad Program.

On behalf of COE, I invite you to explore the possibilities, seize the opportunities, and embark on a journey of discovery. Together, let us strive to create a world where every young person and adult has equal access to the transformative power of education.

**Kimberly Jones**

President

Council for Opportunity in Education

# COE AND STUDY ABROAD

In the late 1990s, the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) founding president, Dr. Arnold Mitchem, and immediate past president, Maureen Hoyler, attended the European Access Network (EAN). The EAN comprises faculty and professionals in Europe seeking to address access issues like those tackled by COE. Dr. Mitchem was invited to join the EAN board of directors. They recognized that equal educational access extended beyond the U.S., emphasizing the need for international experiences in all individuals' education and professional development. In 2000, COE sponsored the initial two study abroad experiences for TRIO college students, followed by study tours for TRIO professionals in the subsequent two years.

Initially, COE observed that TRIO student participants were unaware of or unable to seize study-abroad opportunities. Andriano (2010) notes that underrepresented students cannot be generalized with most students when examining barriers to access. He refers to a groundbreaking 2003 study, which underscores institutional relationships, particularly those working with low-income, first-generation students, as pivotal in engaging or disengaging them in study abroad.

In 2003, a study discovered that individuals directly assisting TRIO participants only promote student participation if they specifically encourage it. This study, one of the few examining the participation of low-income, first-generation TRIO students, offers empirical evidence supporting the influence of institutional references on a student's decision to pursue studying abroad (Norfles, 2003). The impact of TRIO staff is significant.

COE subsequently developed an international access initiative, supporting and creating opportunities for TRIO participants. Over the past 20+ years, COE has collaborated with organizations and universities for student programming in Mexico, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Spain, the Netherlands, and other locations, believing all college students, including TRIO participants, should access international experiences. Additionally, COE has sponsored study tours for TRIO professionals in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium.

COE offers TRIO professionals and staff a short 9- to 10-day study abroad experience. These study tours focus on comparing access issues in partner countries, which are part of the European Access Network, typically meeting once a year in a European city. A portion of the cost qualifies as professional development. TRIO staff may also apply to chaperone students on their study abroad experience. In brief, COE hopes staff will consider a TRIO staff abroad opportunity.

COE affirms that study abroad experiences enrich students' lives, enhancing their understanding of other cultures and equipping them with skills vital in today's evolving job market. Through international programming, COE and its partners immerse TRIO students into diverse classroom settings, where they engage with students from around the globe, discussing pressing issues. To further enrich the college experience, COE promotes the value of TRIO participants choosing to study abroad in both short-term and long-term programs. An international education, whether a few weeks in the summer or an entire semester abroad, can be one of the most rewarding and exhilarating experiences in a person's life. Experiencing a new culture, facing new challenges, and opening one's mind to a new world has numerous benefits.

# WHY PROMOTE STUDY ABROAD

## *A Beneficial High-Impact Practice*

In today's increasingly interconnected world, developing global competencies is crucial to being a college graduate. However, experiences such as internships, travel, and study abroad have traditionally been more accessible to middle- and upper-income students, leaving many low-income students disadvantaged. Recognizing the importance of study abroad experiences, COE emphasizes that they are critically important high-impact Practices that TRIO students should actively participate in.

Studying abroad broadens students' horizons and equips them with skills highly valued by employers. According to an IIE report, studying abroad positively impacts developing a wide range of 21st-century job skills, including intercultural skills, adaptability, confidence, communication, problem-solving, and tolerance for ambiguity.

Moreover, studying abroad expands career possibilities and enhances long-term career progression and promotion opportunities. Longer periods of study abroad have been found to have a significant impact on subsequent job offers and skill development. Even short-term programs foster teamwork skills and develop traits such as resourcefulness, adaptability, resilience, and empathy, which are invaluable in any job market.

Here are some compelling reasons to promote study abroad to students:

1. **Career Opportunities:** Studying abroad enhances intercultural skills and provides students with a new perspective on culture and language, making them more desirable to future employers.
2. **Educational Reinforcement:** Enrolling in a study abroad program allows students to explore facets of their major that may not be apparent at home, reinforcing their educational experience.
3. **Graduate School Consideration:** Students who have studied abroad demonstrate additional commitment to their education, making them attractive candidates for graduate schools seeking diverse perspectives.
4. **Personal Development:** Studying abroad allows students to discover themselves while gaining insights into different cultures, fostering personal growth.
5. **Life Experience:** For many students, studying abroad during their college years may be their only chance to travel abroad for an extended period, enriching their lives profoundly.

By promoting study abroad opportunities, TRIO staff can empower students to broaden their horizons, develop essential skills, and seize opportunities for personal and professional growth in an increasingly globalized world.

## *Increasing College Completion and Career Opportunities*

Conversations about studying abroad with TRIO students are incredibly important for several reasons. Despite the increasing enrollment of low-income college students, their graduation rates remain

significantly lower than their wealthier peers. Moreover, their college experiences often differ greatly due to limited time and financial resources, preventing them from accessing valuable college experiences, assets, and social capital essential for professional success post-graduation.

While institutions strive to broaden access to all students, it's crucial to ensure that low-income students have equitable opportunities. Unfortunately, statistics show that while the number of students studying abroad has tripled over the past two decades, participation among low-income students and students of color remains disproportionately low. This imbalance disadvantages low-income students, especially considering that three-quarters of companies prefer candidates with a global perspective.

Therefore, study abroad experiences serve as a gateway to future career opportunities. In today's globalized society, future leaders must possess the skills necessary for success in a diverse workforce. Employers actively seek individuals who have engaged in study abroad programs, as these experiences expose students to new environments and situations, fostering personal and academic growth.

Study abroad experiences equip students with a unique skill set highly valued by employers. These experiences cultivate adaptability, cultural competence, communication skills, and a global perspective, which are increasingly important in today's interconnected world. By engaging in study abroad programs, TRIO students not only enhance their academic and personal development but also position themselves competitively in the job market, opening doors to many future career opportunities.



# ASSIST IN PREPARING STUDENTS TO STUDY ABROAD

Preparing to study abroad is an exciting endeavor filled with high expectations, questions, and perhaps anxiety. As TRIO staff, your guidance and support are crucial in helping students navigate this transformative experience. Here are seven things you can do to assist your students as they prepare for their study-abroad adventure:

1. **Explain the role of COE:** Provide students with a comprehensive understanding of COE and its study abroad programs. emphasize that these programs are designed in collaboration with partners who understand the concerns of first-generation and low-income students about going abroad. Highlight COE's commitment to maintaining a homogeneous group of TRIO low-income, first-generation students as the foundation of its program. Additionally, ensure that students understand how COE represents TRIO and their interests. Share key information about COE, including its establishment in 1981 and its dedication to expanding college opportunities for low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities nationwide. Reiterate COE's vision that every young person and adult deserves an equal opportunity to prepare for, attend, and graduate from college.
2. **Teach goal setting:** Encourage students to set clear and achievable goals for their study abroad experience. Explain the importance of goal setting in giving them autonomy and control over their learning journey. Stress the significance of consistency, self-awareness, and honesty in this process, as these qualities will guide students toward meaningful outcomes.
3. **Set up research opportunities:** Encourage students to research their study abroad destination. Promote exploration of the destination's history, culture, cuisine, language, landmarks, cities, notable figures, music, and more. Encourage students to immerse themselves in learning about their destination to enhance their appreciation and understanding of the culture they will encounter.
4. **Increase excitement:** Foster enthusiasm among participants by allowing them to share their research findings and experiences. Encourage students to participate in presentations in your program, on your campus, and at state and regional conferences whenever possible. These platforms allow students to showcase their knowledge, insights, and reflections, igniting excitement and anticipation for their upcoming study abroad experience.

By following these steps, you can effectively support and empower your students as they embark on their study abroad journey, ensuring a fulfilling and enriching experience for all involved.

**Don't forget the practical.** Besides preparation for academic success, your students will need to know how to:

- Identify and apply for scholarships to study abroad.



- Develop budget for dining and other living expenses.
- Pay close attention to dates and meeting deadlines.
- Apply for a passport and any applicable visa.
- Complete medical requirements.
- Prepare an emergency contact list.
- Confirm transportation and housing.
- Pay fees and deposits.
- Plan considering commitments at home, i.e., rent, etc.
- Ensure plans are in order.
- Print backup copies of important documents, including I.D., passport, visa, acceptance letters, insurance coverage, prescriptions, etc.
- Obtain enough prescriptions for the duration of the program.
- Consider exchange rates and exchange fees.
- Identify an international phone plan to maintain communication.
- Confirm airline and arrival arrangements.
- Drink plenty of water and build up their immune system.
- Pack light, consider items in carry, and dress appropriately.
- Find and introduce themselves to the faculty and other students.
- Work through homesickness.

**Host a Q-and-A session.** Have other students, faculty, or staff from your school already traveled abroad? Invite them to have a round-table question and answer session with your students, in which they can talk about what they wish they had known, and your TRIO participants can pepper them with questions.

**Work on listening skills.** While overseas, your students will be spending far more time than ever before actively listening to native speakers. If prepared, the experience can be smooth and manageable. Set students up for success by encouraging them to do more listening activities from authentic material (such as lectures, podcasts, news reports, etc.) to get familiar with their host culture.

# TIPS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

## *Self-Discovery*

Studying abroad can be seen as a discovery of self and others. Because studying abroad is full of new experiences, please encourage your students to dig a little deeper in the months leading up to their departure by developing a growth mindset, increasing overall confidence, and regularly revisiting the skills they find most challenging, such as speaking up in groups. Helping your students prepare to study abroad can be extremely rewarding, especially once they return full of confidence and independence.

Helping students better understand how their identity may shape their study abroad experiences will allow them to make sense of and relate to the multiple aspects of the foreign language, culture, and society. Goldoni, F. (2015) provides activities to help staff help students "unpack" their cultural identity and backgrounds (p.7, Goldoni, F. (2015))<sup>1</sup>

## *Peacebuilding Skills*

As students prepare for international experiences, peacebuilding skills are invaluable for navigating new perspectives and building relationships with individuals holding differing viewpoints. Here are some essential skills students should prioritize:

1. **Reading Nonverbal Signs:** Research suggests that approximately 80 percent of communication is nonverbal. Effectively communicating entails understanding both verbal and nonverbal cues. Being adept at interpreting nonverbal signals enhances communication and fosters understanding.
2. **Listening to Understand:** Effective communication involves both speaking and listening. Active listening fosters mutual understanding, which involves listening and responding to others. By actively listening, students can gain insight into new perspectives while building trust and rapport with others they encounter.
3. **Understanding Conflict Styles:** Students must understand their conflict resolution style. Given that they may encounter perspectives with which they disagree during their time abroad, being aware of their preferred conflict resolution approach can help them navigate disagreements more effectively and strive for positive outcomes.
4. **Learning from Disagreements:** Encountering different perspectives may make students uncomfortable and hesitant to engage in conversation. However, disagreement is a natural and constructive aspect of discourse. Encourage students to articulate their viewpoints while also considering the perspectives of others. Students can deepen their understanding and foster meaningful exchanges by engaging in respectful dialogue.

By honing these peacebuilding skills, students can enrich their international experiences, foster meaningful connections, and navigate diverse perspectives with openness and empathy.

## *Perceptions of an American*

As students prepare to travel abroad as Americans, it's crucial to understand how they may be perceived

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<sup>1</sup> Goldoni, F. (2015) Preparing students for studying abroad. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 1-20.)

as representatives of the United States. As ambassadors of American culture, they might serve as someone's initial point of contact with American society. Culture encompasses a particular nation or people's customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements, necessitating openness to diversity, class, and economic differences.

Being an American abroad carries significant responsibility, demanding sensitivity and tact. Various topics may arise, including politics, popular culture, and crime. In such instances, it's essential to promote effective communication, which revolves around understanding the other person rather than winning arguments or imposing opinions. The key lies in respecting the audience and employing active listening practices, such as encouraging verbal cues, asking questions, and refraining from judgment.

Furthermore, irrespective of their political beliefs or ability to influence global politics, individuals abroad might perceive each American as personally accountable for decisions made by the United States government. Consequently, as Americans hold preconceived notions, many preconceptions exist about U.S. citizens and their characteristics. Once again, students should be advised that part of being an American abroad involves approaching questions and conversations with an open mind, respecting the audience, and practicing active listening.



# STUDY ABROAD RE-ENTRY

## *Reverse Culture Shock*

When students first arrive at their study abroad location, they may encounter boredom, homesickness, difficulties in developing and managing changed relationships and struggle to acclimate to the new environment. For instance, they may feel lonely or experience isolation. Similar feelings may arise after they return home from completing their study abroad program. It's important to note that these feelings of culture shock are normal.

Upon their return, students may undergo reverse culture shock. According to the University of Nebraska Omaha, "Reverse culture shock occurs because a place that once felt entirely familiar suddenly seems strange and foreign. Studying abroad is disruptive in a good way, but it can lead to some unexpected emotions." Therefore, students' self-awareness becomes crucial when returning to their home country.

For additional information about reverse culture shock, refer to the ISEP list of four common stages: 1. Disengagement; 2. Euphoria; 3. Dampened Euphoria; and 4. Gradual Readjustment. ISEP also provides insights into "Some things that will be different" and offers "Tips for overcoming culture shock." Expected changes may include shifts in relationships with friends and family, perspectives of the United States, and future plans.

Promoting study abroad staff as a resource to support TRIO students is imperative. TRIO advisors and COE study abroad staff should be available should a student begin to experience reverse culture shock. Their guidance and support can greatly assist students in navigating the challenges of readjusting to their home environment after enriching study abroad experiences.

## *Putting the Study Abroad Experience to Work*

To support TRIO participants' persistence and the full benefit of their study abroad experience, here are a few suggestions to advise them on to keep them engaged.

- Apply to be a study abroad advocate on your campus.
- Serve on TRIO Panels on campus and at state, regional, and national conferences, and share experiences to motivate and inspire others from similar backgrounds to study abroad.
- Apply to U.S. Department of State opportunities.

A career guide that the IUPUI<sup>2</sup> study abroad office prepared to help their students leverage their study abroad experience once they return home is also [a helpful resource](https://abroad.iupui.edu/doc/misc/career-toolkit). Help them celebrate their accomplishments and reflect on their growth!

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<sup>2</sup> Putting your study abroad experience to work, IUPUI Study Abroad Office = <https://abroad.iupui.edu/doc/misc/career-toolkit>