

Step-by-Step Guide to Studying Abroad for Students at the School of International Service, American University

Studying abroad is an exciting opportunity that can greatly enhance your educational experience at SIS. Students applying to study abroad are expected to take ownership of their application process. To help you navigate the process, here's a step-by-step guide of studying abroad with the SIS Office of International Programs (OIP):

Program Decision and Application

Step 1: Research and Planning

- **Research Programs:** Explore study abroad programs offered by OIP. Consider factors such as courses, location, duration, language of instruction, language test requirements, and eligibility requirements. Please note: All SIS MA students must complete one semester of classes at AU prior to participating in an SIS study abroad program. You may begin an application to go abroad during your first semester at SIS, but you cannot go abroad during your first semester.
- **Consider your Health:** Think about the tools you use to stay healthy in your home context, including medications, doctors' appointments, therapy, etc. Research your medications, vitamins and supplements to understand what you are permitted or not permitted to bring with you to your host country and research what will be available for purchase once abroad. Make a plan with your physician and/or therapist to maintain your well-being while abroad.
- **Meet with OIP:** Meet with the study abroad advisor for your program(s) of interest in OIP. Come prepared with the results of your program research and questions regarding your program of interest.
- **Identify Goals:** Determine your academic, personal, and professional goals for studying abroad. Are you seeking language proficiency, cultural immersion, specific coursework, job shadowing opportunities, etc.?
- **Meet with an Academic Advisor:** Schedule a meeting with your academic advisor at SIS to discuss your study abroad plans and ensure that your chosen program aligns with your academic goals. Come to this meeting with a list of potential courses and descriptions of courses you would like to take while abroad, if necessary for your program of interest.

Step 2: Choose a Program

- **Program Selection:** Choose a study abroad program that aligns with your goals, academic requirements, budget, and personal preferences. Consider semester, year-long, or summer programs.
- **Check Eligibility:** Review program-specific criteria, including GPA requirements, language proficiency, and academic calendar.
- **Credit Transfer:** Discuss course options with your academic advisor so you understand the requirements for your degree plan. If you are an undergraduate

student, you may reference the AU Course Equivalency Database in MyAU to see how courses taken abroad have transferred back for students in the past five years. This database is not an exhaustive list of courses and students should review the course catalog(s) of the host institution. Students must take classes abroad for a letter grade. Students cannot take classes pass/fail and obtain credit for their degree plan at American University.

- **Note Deadlines:** Deadlines vary by program and are often set with the timeline for nomination and application deadlines for the host institution in mind. Mark your calendar and allow plenty of time to apply.

Step 3: SIS Application

- **Online Application:** Open the online SIS application through the AU Abroad study abroad portal. Be prepared to provide a copy of your passport, academic history, and program preferences. Please note, the SIS application involves multiple steps and cannot be completed in a single day. Students may only apply to one SIS study abroad program per term.
- **Personal Statement:** Write a compelling personal statement outlining your motivations for studying abroad, academic/professional goals, and what you hope to gain from the experience.
- **Faculty Recommender:** For the SIS application, students should contact at least one faculty member to request they serve as a reference for the study abroad application. The SIS application requires only the contact information of a faculty recommender. Faculty recommendation requirements vary across programs for the host institution application – some require a form instead of a letter and some may require more than one recommendation. Review the requirements for the program of interest to understand what will be required of the recommender, if nominated to the program. If the host institution has additional requirements, students should ask for those requirements from the faculty upon acceptance of the nomination.
- **Academic Advisor Approval:** Follow up with your academic advisor for course approval via email or in an advising appointment. Send your advisor your personal statement, course descriptions, and the Academic Advisor Approval form in the application portal for signature. It is recommended that you provide several back-up courses for approval in addition to your preferred courses. Please allow sufficient time to consult with your advisor before your application is due.
- **Order Official Transcript:** If an official transcript is required for the host institution application, you should order an official transcript prior to the SIS application deadline to receive the official transcript in time for the host institution application if you are nominated.

Step 4: Financial Planning

- **Budgeting:** Research the estimated costs of your chosen study abroad program, including accommodation, meals, travel to host country, visa(s) applications, travel

for visas, transportation, host institution fees, and other expenses. Ensure you are aware of what costs are included in the program fee or not. Create a budget plan based on those costs, considering the cost of living in your host city and a buffer for unforeseen expenses.

- **Scholarships and Financial Aid:** Explore available [study abroad scholarships and financial aid options](#) to help fund your study abroad. When studying abroad on an SIS program, students pay AU tuition like for a normal semester at AU. Because of this, most students are able to pay for their tuition abroad with their financial aid.
- **Meet with Financial Aid Office:** Schedule a meeting with the financial aid office if you have questions about how your current financial aid package may apply to your study abroad program.

Step 5: Host Institution Application

Host institution applications are not applicable to students studying abroad on SIS faculty-led programs, including seminars and the practica.

- **Notification of SIS Application Results:** After your application is reviewed you will be notified if you are selected for nomination to the host university. Nomination to a host university does not guarantee acceptance to the program. Once you have confirmed your nomination, your study abroad advisor will notify the host institution to begin the nomination and host institution application process.
- **Application Requirements:** Paper versus electronic application, official transcript required, and language test results. You should review the requirements for your program's application on the online program brochure in the AU Abroad portal and any additional application guide from the host institution.
- **Faculty Recommendation:** Once you are notified of your nomination, you should contact your faculty recommender to let them know you are being nominated to the host institution for the program. If a recommendation is required for the host institution application, you should inform the faculty member of the requirements and deadline.

Pre-Departure

Step 6: Pre-Departure Preparation

- **Visa and Documentation:** Research visa requirements for your chosen study abroad destination and ensure you have all necessary documentation, such as a valid passport, student visa, and health insurance.
- **Health and Safety:** Attend pre-departure orientations and/or class meetings that cover health and safety information, cultural adjustment, and emergency procedures. Make sure you have access to pre-travel medical care and necessary and/or recommended vaccinations.

- **Housing and Travel:** Arrange your housing accommodations, if necessary, and plan your travel logistics, including flights and transportation from the airport to your destination.
- **Check Your Email:** While the semester may have come to an end, students are expected to continue to check their AU email (and host university email, if students have access) over the break to ensure you receive important information (admissions decisions, registration updates, etc.) and provide responses related to your time abroad in a timely manner.
- **Mandatory Pre-Departure Orientation:** All accepted students are required to attend a mandatory pre-departure orientation (PDO) prior to departure in addition to electronically submitting several application materials. The mandatory PDO will review program registration, course approval, AU billing, travel safety and security, travel insurance and other miscellaneous items related to studying abroad.
- **Establish a Communication Plan:** Prior to traveling, students should research provider's policies for international calling and data plans. You must decide how you plan to communicate with those in your host country and loved ones at home. Set expectations with loved ones with how you may communicate while abroad and the frequency at which you will be in communication.
- **Submitting New Course Equivalencies:** Once accepted to a program and after the host university's course catalogue is published for the term you will be abroad, undergraduate students may begin submitting new equivalency requests for courses that are not already in the [Course Equivalency Database](#).

Step 7: Visa Application

- **Upon Acceptance:** Once accepted to a program, students will be provided with the necessary information and documentation to apply for a visa, if necessary for the program.
- **Expectations for the Process:** Students in study abroad programs are responsible for investigating requirements for entering their host country, understanding whether a visa is required, and for obtaining all necessary documents needed to obtain their visa(s). In some cases, students may need to travel out of state to the appropriate consulate that corresponds to their home jurisdiction. While AU and its partners will provide students with a letter of enrollment, students are expected to furnish all supplemental, required documents as mandated by the embassy or consulate of their host country or countries. Please note if you do not secure the proper visa for your intended destination and purpose, you may be denied entry to your host country or forced to return to the US whether you have completed your program or not. If this is the case, AU will not be liable for any financial or academic costs you incur.

Step 8: Host Institution Requirements

- **Forms/University Processes:** Ensure you complete all required forms and processes required by the host institution, so you are enrolled and in compliance for the duration of your time abroad.

Arrival/Abroad

Step 9: Academics Abroad

- **Course Registration:** If your program requires you to register for courses after you have arrived in the country, do so within the time frame specified. Please note, some universities do not have the same flexibility for adding and dropping courses as AU. If you fail to register for courses during the registration period, SIS cannot guarantee the host university will be able to register you for courses outside of the registration period.
- **Update SIS on Course Enrollment:** Graduate students must notify SIS of any changes to your schedule upon arrival and/or official registration abroad. If any of the courses you register for are different than those that you initially had approved, you are required to submit an updated Academic Advisor Approval form approved by your SIS Academic Advisor before the end of the first week of classes at the institution abroad. Undergraduate students must submit new equivalency requests for any courses which are not currently listed in the Course Equivalency Database.
- **Course Reporting:** All undergraduate students participating in an SIS OIP study abroad program should follow the [AU course reporting process](#) to ensure that their credits are transferred back to their AU degree.

Step 10: Life Abroad

- **Updating Information:** Students who are not participating in SIS faculty-led programs must update their contact information and address once abroad in the application portal.
- **Immigration Requirements:** Be sure to follow guidance from the host country government and university regarding any visa/immigration procedures you may be required to complete after entering the country.
- **Cultural Engagement:** Immerse yourself in the local culture, participate in cultural events, connect with your peers, and engage with local communities to make the most of your experience.
- **Academic Success:** Maintain a healthy balance between academics and exploration. Attend classes regularly, complete assignments on time, and seek support if needed.
- **Travel and Exploration:** You may want to take advantage of weekends and breaks to explore nearby cities and countries but be mindful to keep a healthy balance, so you are immersing yourself in your host community.
- **Document Your Time:** Consider keeping a blog or writing posts on LinkedIn to document your time abroad.

- **Transcript Order:** It is the student's responsibility to ensure the transcript from the term abroad is sent to the Official of International Programs for processing upon completion of the program. You may be able to authorize this at the beginning of your term abroad. Be mindful, some institutions will not release your transcript unless you have completed course assessments and any other administrative requirements. Complete all requirements for your host institution to avoid a delay in the processing of your grades.

Return

Step 11: Return and Reflection

- **Re-Entry Support:** Participate in any re-entry programs and workshops organized by American University to help you readjust to life back home and integrate your study abroad experience into your academic and personal journey. Keep in touch with people you met while abroad.
- **Transcripts:** Many universities do not provide transcripts as quickly as AU does. Students should anticipate a delay in their grades from their time abroad being applied to their EagleService upon completion of their studies abroad.
- **Share Your Experience:** Consider sharing your study abroad experiences with fellow students through presentations, blog posts, or involvement in relevant campus organizations.
- **Professional Development:** Be sure to update your résumé and LinkedIn upon completion of your program. Engage with the SIS International Programs alumni LinkedIn group.

Studying abroad through SIS at American University is a transformative experience that can broaden your perspective, enhance your academic journey, and prepare you for a globalized world. By following these steps and actively engaging in the process, you'll be well on your way to a successful study abroad adventure.