

How to Choose a Study Abroad Program

Choosing a study abroad program can be a difficult and daunting task. Before choosing or applying to a program, it is extremely important for students to consider several factors: goals, interests, budget, and more. Picking a place based solely on the travel opportunities it provides isn't the best way to choose a study abroad experience.

Factors to consider when choosing a study abroad destination:



COURSES

One of the most important elements in choosing a program is to pick one that complements your major and fits with your future goals. You should seek out a program that offers courses you need to continue progressing toward graduation at a steady rate. With enough planning, students can study abroad and not delay graduation.



LOCATION

You've all heard of places like Paris, Tokyo, Buenos Aires, Florence, and London, and it's tempting to go to a place you're already familiar with, but it's also worth considering places you're not as familiar with or "off the beaten path". Big cities are great for visiting, but sometimes you get a more authentic cultural experience in a secondary city. Not only is the cost of living lower, but it's easier to immerse yourself in the host culture when you're not surrounded by Americans and services catering to a large tourist population. There's no point in going to France if you're going to spend the whole time meeting other Americans!



IMMERSION

Consider how much interaction you'll have with locals. Do you have the opportunity to live in a home stay, apartment or residence hall with local students, or are you only placed with other Americans? Are there opportunities for internships, service-learning, or volunteer activities that will get you out in the community? How about language-partner programs where you are paired with a local student? These are all great ways to get to know local people, and are much easier than shouting in a noisy bar or approaching strangers in a café!



LANGUAGE

We strongly recommend that you study a local language of the place where you're studying, even if its not required or that's not the reason you're studying abroad. Learning the language is a sign of respect to your local hosts. It's also worth remembering, though, that while Czech and Bengali are useful to learn on-site, we don't offer those courses here at Gonzaga, so it's unlikely you'll be able to complete an Arts & Sciences language requirement based on those languages.



LENGTH

Lots of students choose to study abroad in the summer, thinking that it will be less expensive or that they don't have enough room in their schedule to study abroad in the semester. We strongly recommend talking to your academic advisor early on and plotting out your academic plan to find out where a semester of study abroad fits in. It is usually less expensive to study abroad during the semester compared to the summer. There are also more opportunities for scholarships, immersion, and wider course selection during semester and academic year long programs. Also, no one ever said, "I wish I hadn't studied abroad as long as I did."



EXTRACURRICULAR

The classroom learning is important, but what you get outside of the classroom is just as impactful. When it comes time for research amenities and the destination, here are some criteria to look for: What cultural activities are available to you? What is the nightlife like? How easy is it to travel away from your host city? Part of the cultural experience is to experience your city as a local would: have fish & chips in England, in Spain, it's going out for sangria and tapas, in Jordan it may be going out for tea, in Tokyo it could be a karaoke. The more time you spend interacting with local people, the faster your language skills will improve.