

FUNDAMENTALS OF STUDY ABROAD

Guidelines for all Vassar College students who plan
a semester or a year of international study.



Office of International Programs
Main North 173
(845) 437-5260

Table of Contents

Study Abroad at Vassar: Academic Objectives*	4
Preliminary Study Abroad Requirements at Vassar*	4
Academic Planning: Pre-application Considerations*	5-8
Declaring a Major*	
Area Studies Coursework*	
Choosing a Foreign Study Program	
Program Location	
Vassar Sponsored Programs	
Language Proficiency Requirement*	
Terms of Study*	
The JYA Application	8-10
Application Due Date	
Proposed Coursework Abroad*	
The Statement of Purpose*	
Faculty Recommendations	
Post-approval Considerations	10-12
Changes to an Approved Study Abroad Plan	
Vassar Status While on JYA	
Conditions for Provisional Approval	
Special Programs/Independent Study Courses Abroad	
Financial Aid	
JYA Financial Procedures	
Cancellations, Emergency or Otherwise	
Passports and Visas	
Health and Safety Guidelines	
Health and Accident Insurance	
Post-Study Abroad	12
Transferring Credit from Study Abroad Programs	

Please note:

The sections marked with an asterisk () contain information relating to the criteria by which all applications for permission to study abroad will be evaluated by the Committee on Leaves and Privileges. To gain approval, all students must address these concerns directly in their proposals for study abroad.*

Study Abroad at Vassar: Academic Objectives

The Vassar faculty requires that study abroad be an integral part of a student's overall academic plan. This does not mean that study abroad plans must relate only to the major, but it does mean that students must demonstrate that their plans for study abroad support and enhance intellectual interests that they have pursued, and will continue to pursue, on campus.

Students thinking of study abroad should carefully weigh the benefits of off-campus study against the academic benefits of a semester or year on campus. Are there specific academic benefits in such study that would not be possible were they to remain at Vassar? Foreign language majors have an evident justification for study abroad, but students with a wide range of departmental and program majors at Vassar may profit from the in-depth exposure to a foreign culture that study abroad entails. Other advantages might include coursework toward the major or correlate that is not offered at Vassar, fieldwork opportunities that enhance departmental offerings, and language acquisition. In weighing these considerations, it is essential that students consult in detail with their major advisors, acquaint themselves with the academic calendar of the program or university in which they are interested, and make as concrete plans as possible regarding coursework abroad. If one's plans include an independent study or internship, these must be mapped out ahead of time with the major adviser. Fieldwork experiences abroad do not receive credit.

In order to study abroad, a student must have taken appropriate coursework at Vassar. This preparation may consist of both specific prerequisite courses and more general cultural study. Students who plan to go to a European country where Vassar requires prior language study—where enrollment in a foreign university is encouraged—such study must be a continuing and meaningful part of the student's program at Vassar. In addition, students should be able to explain clearly how they plan to build upon the academic work completed abroad when they return to campus, and thus second semester seniors may not study abroad.

There is a great difference between travel and study abroad, and while the former may be "the experience of a lifetime" which fosters personal growth, foreign study must be directed to advancing academic goals. Summer study abroad may be appropriate for some students.

Preliminary Study Abroad Requirements at Vassar

Vassar students wishing to study abroad must have the support of their major department and the appropriate language department, as well as formal approval by the Committee on Leaves and Privileges (CLP). To be eligible to apply, members of the sophomore class must have:

- completed at least one full year's work at Vassar;
- declared a major, chosen a major adviser, and discussed study abroad plans in detail with him/her;
- recommended cumulative and major GPA of 3.2;
- taken sufficient area studies courses or have a plan to complete them;
- satisfied the applicable language requirement and demonstrated sustained interest in language acquisition;
- selected an appropriate program or programs.
- Meet CLP recommendations if given a provisional status.

Academic Planning for Study Abroad: Pre-application Considerations

Declaring a Major

In general, all applications for year-long study or study in either semester of the junior year must be submitted in early December. Therefore, it is imperative that students contemplating study abroad declare a major as early in the sophomore year as possible. The earlier the major is declared, the more time the student has to think about the ramifications of study abroad and discuss the various issues in detail with the major adviser.

Some departments and faculty members may be unable to extend the necessary help late in the semester. Check with the department in question, pick up any information they might have available, and declare your major early. Interdepartmental and Multidisciplinary programs have lengthier declaration periods as student proposals must be approved by a committee. Please indicate if your major falls into this category. Sometimes it is difficult to have such a major declared by the JYA application deadline. Consideration of a correlate sequence or a second major can wait until after the JYA deadline—in the second semester or even after returning to campus from study abroad.

Area Studies Coursework

Students must demonstrate to the Committee on Leaves and Privileges that their overall academic program is better served by study abroad than by continued study on campus. The Committee expects applicants for study abroad to have acquired sufficient area studies coursework to support their academic proposals, as well as to enable them to take full advantage of the academic opportunities offered by foreign study programs. Thus, the Committee expects that students will have completed at least one or, depending upon the student's purpose, even several courses directly relevant to the proposed JYA program as detailed in the statement of purpose. Beside language requirements—which, depending on the student's academic goals, may serve as area studies coursework for students who must take at least two years—students should expect to take at least one area studies course at the intermediate level. The area studies requirement is particularly important to study abroad in non-Western and developing nations. Students looking to study in Africa, Latin America or Asia would be well advised to read the course offerings in the college catalogue in detail. They should also be aware that many courses essential to study outside of Western Europe may be offered only in alternate years, and thus should plan accordingly.

Language Proficiency

Language proficiency is a primary consideration in achieving one's academic goals in a non-English speaking country. Beyond being able to hold a simple conversation or to order a meal in a foreign language while traveling, students studying abroad must be able to follow complicated lectures, read scholarly books, and to function on their own for long periods in a foreign culture.

In general, Vassar requires that study abroad participants have taken the equivalent of two years of study in the appropriate foreign language; this means that a student must have completed the equivalent of two semesters of a foreign language at the second-year level before participating in a program abroad. A single course, even at the 200 level, is not sufficient. Thus, if you are considering studying abroad for all or part of your junior year and you have not studied a foreign language, you should begin as early as the first semester of your freshman year. Students who meet the minimum language requirement are strongly urged to continue language study until they depart for JYA.

Except as noted below, all coursework abroad **must** be taken in the language of the host country in order to receive credit. This includes France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain, Spanish or French-speaking Latin America and the Caribbean, Francophone Africa, and Russia, among others. Most American college-sponsored programs are conducted in cooperation with a foreign institution or may be taught by foreign faculty, and the language of instruction is generally the language of the host country. For the most part, the minimum requirement for these programs is two years of college-level or equivalent foreign language study. In addition, many foreign universities admit U.S. students under special status—generally to a "School for Foreigners"—where they may take either courses in the language and culture of the host country or the regular university courses. Scientific fieldwork programs taught in English are exempt from the on-site language requirement, although Vassar may require pre-participation language preparation in some cases. One term of an introductory language does not qualify for full transfer credit unless it is an intensive course so designated on the transcript. One term of introductory language work equivalent to 3 or 4 credit hours may receive a 1/2 unit of Vassar College credit. This does not satisfy the language requirement.

The two-year language requirement does not apply for study in cultures where Vassar does not offer instruction in a language appropriate to the chosen program abroad—Vietnamese or Nepali, for example. Thus, depending on their academic needs, students should be sure to check Vassar's language specific requirements. For certain programs Vassar may not require a minimum language proficiency. CLP will make individual decisions.

Generally, for non-English speaking countries where Vassar requires less than two years of language study before study abroad, participants attending programs in English must take intensive courses in the language of the host country for the entire period of their study abroad.

Vassar's Self-Instructional Language Program (SILP) offers beginning, intermediate and advanced instruction in Irish, Hindi, Korean, Portuguese, Swahili, Swedish and Turkish. SILP courses may change so be sure to consult with the SILP Director at Box 269, ext. 5729 for more complete details.

Choosing a Foreign Study Program

Students can find information on various programs, along with some catalogues from foreign universities and evaluations from Vassar students, in the library of the Office of International Programs, located in Main-North 173. Thompson Library also contains catalogues from many foreign universities on microfiche. Most colleges and universities have information on the web. The JYA web site at <http://jya.vassar.edu> also has links to several foreign universities and programs.

Interested students should attend the Study Abroad General Information Session held early each fall semester, where the Director of the Office of International Programs, discusses all general aspects of studying away during the subsequent academic year. More detailed sessions on international study take place throughout the semester and are announced on the JYA web site.

Vassar Sponsored Programs

Vassar sponsors several academic year programs. Programs in Spain and France are administered in consortium with Wesleyan University, and the Italian program is administered with Wesleyan and Wellesley College. The Vassar-sponsored programs are:

Costa Rica: The Cloud Forest School. Application for this program is through the Education Department. For more information please see Professor Christopher Bjork in the Old Observatory, Rm. 209.

England: London Program in Media and Culture at Goldsmith's University This is a spring semester program.

France: The Vassar-Wesleyan Program in Paris is offered for the year or either semester.

Germany: Vassar College is an associate member of the Berlin Consortium, administered by Columbia University. This is a year long or spring term program.

Ireland: The Department of Education sponsors a one-semester elementary or secondary school teaching internship in Clifden, County Galway, Ireland. Application for this program is through the Education Department. For more information please consult with the Chair of the Education Department.

Italy: A semester or year-long program at the University of Bologna, is offered in conjunction with two other colleges, Wellesley College and Wesleyan University.

Russia: The Department of Russian Studies and the Department of Art offer a fall semester program in St. Petersburg at the European University. Many of the classes are taught in the Hermitage Museum.

Spain: The Vassar-Wesleyan Program takes place in Madrid at Carlos III and is offered for the year or for either semester.

These programs, **with the exception of the Berlin Consortium**, award Vassar credit on the transcript and all grades are calculated into the overall GPA.

In addition to our own programs, Vassar has a formal agreement with several foreign universities that enable our students to enroll directly at their institutions as exchange students.

China: University of Peking, Yuanpei College

England: University of Exeter

France: Sciences Po for a year or the spring term.

Japan: Ritsumeikan University
Ochanomizu University

Students may also choose to study on other study abroad programs. The Office of International Programs and the Committee on Leaves and Privileges review foreign study programs annually to approve programs that meet Vassar's academic standards. Students should refer to the current list of approved foreign study programs before beginning their research.

No foreign study program can be a guaranteed perfect choice; students should be prepared to experience both positive and negative moments abroad. The information found on study abroad program websites relates mainly to the academic side of study abroad, and should be supplemented with research about the culture and country under consideration. The Vassar library contains a wealth of information on the politics, geography, economies, religions, arts, and cultures of countries around the world; the student should look into these elements prior to visiting the Office of International Programs, as this knowledge will help greatly in deciding which program is the right one. Students should keep in mind that the Committee on Leaves and Privileges expects study abroad to be primarily directed to academic and intellectual growth. Although the personal gains are also important, one's plans must revolve around academic studies.

Ordinarily, the Committee on Leaves and Privileges will not consider requests for sequential a/b semester leaves in two different countries. Thus, application for full-year study abroad should address plans for only one country. If a student and his/her advisor feel that specific academic needs require study in two countries, the student must include a detailed rationale for such a plan in their Statement of Purpose.

Program Location

In considering programs, one should think about the advantages and disadvantages of a program's location. Large cities offer excellent cultural opportunities, but may also be expensive and impersonal. A small town in a farming region may offer more contact with local residents and the experience of a way of life found only in that particular country, but the provincial lifestyle may prove disorienting to some students.

While fewer than ten percent of U.S. students go abroad to Asian, African, or Latin American countries, an increasing number of Vassar study abroad participants elect to study in developing nations. Opportunities to study in developing countries are extensive, and Vassar approves programs around the globe, subject to US State Department guidelines and recommendations. If studying in one of these countries seems appropriate for you, check with your Study Abroad adviser or speak with a faculty member who specializes in these areas. It is also important to discuss your JYA plans with your parents/guardians.

Terms of Study

Students may apply for permission to study abroad for either a semester or for the full academic year. Ordinarily, the Committee on Leaves and Privileges will not consider requests for sequential a/b semester leaves in two different countries. All such requests will be evaluated on an individual basis. Please keep in mind that while studying in two different countries is possible in theory, there may be other barriers to accomplishing this such as insufficient time to obtain the necessary visas.

The Application for Permission to Apply to Study Abroad Programs

To be considered for study abroad status by CLP, the student must submit a Study Abroad Application, which can be accessed online at <https://secure2.vassar.edu/applyjya/>. The deadline for submitting this application, no matter whether you plan to spend a full year or a single semester away (fall or spring), is always the first Monday in December. The application consists of four parts:

- Part I: Request for Permission to Apply for Junior Year Abroad (including proposed coursework abroad and the **Academic Statement of Purpose**)
- Part II: Recommendation of the Major Adviser
- Part III: Instructor's Recommendation
- Part IV: Recommendation from a Language Instructor (if required)

Part I: Proposed Coursework Abroad

The kinds of courses available at the various programs under consideration must be carefully researched and detailed, so that students and advisers can plan how the semester or year spent abroad will harmonize with and advance the student's work on campus. Listing the proposed coursework to be taken abroad as accurately as possible (given the obvious difficulty of such projection many months in advance) provides a foundation for the Statement of Purpose and allows the members of CLP to assess how the student's plans comprise a coherent academic program. Students should address in the essay the ways in which they believe that the courses taken abroad will provide necessary background for further work on campus.

While CLP and the Office of International Programs recognize that it is often difficult to adhere to a list of courses compiled far in advance of actually enrolling in a study abroad program, they expect students

to conform to the spirit of the plans set forth in the application, and where possible or practical, to the letter. If substantive changes in coursework are called for, these must be made in consultation with the major adviser, with details provided in writing to the Office of International Programs.

The Statement of Purpose

Along with recommendations from faculty, "The Statement of Purpose" is the most important part of the JYA application. This essay should be considered an academic exercise that would be turned in for a grade. Five members of the faculty will be reading it. The more formally you treat your subject, the better your argument will be. Not everyone agrees that study abroad is essential to every liberal arts education, so use the standard academic approach of an introduction, a reasoned argument—providing evidence, proving points—and a conclusion. Clarity, brevity, coherence are important. Beyond general form and seriousness of approach, however, each applicant will have different reasons for study abroad. In general, the essay should seek to prove that study abroad will provide tangible academic benefits not available on campus, and the more research the student has done beforehand, particularly regarding coursework, the better the essay will be.

Parts II, III, & IV - Major Adviser and Faculty Recommendations

A few points should be taken into consideration concerning faculty recommendations:

1. The end of the semester is just as hectic for faculty members as for you. Therefore, please make sure that you have handed out your recommendation forms well in advance of the deadline, and preferably by early November.
2. Since many advisers are unable to devote several lengthy sessions to each student's study abroad plans, it is advisable to prepare in advance for your consultation with your advisor. This may entail researching programs ahead of time, drawing up a tentative list of courses, thinking about where and why you wish to study abroad, or even writing a draft of the essay. The more material you provide, the more fruitful your talks will be.
3. Never send a recommendation form to a faculty member whom you have not already asked to write on your behalf. Faculty members who have not agreed in advance to write a recommendation for you are under no obligation to do so.
4. Faculty recommendations must be from at least two different faculty members.
5. Students with double majors must request a Recommendation of the Major Adviser form from both advisers.

Please note: applying for JYA precludes applications for Domestic Study Away such as the 12 College Exchange, Washington Semester program or other academic leaves of absence during the same period.

Post-Approval Considerations

Changes to an Approved Study Abroad Plan

Substantive changes to one's study abroad plans once they have been approved—such as changes of country, major changes in proposed course-work, and/or to one's academic focus during JYA—must be submitted in writing to the Committee on Leaves and Privileges using the petition forms available on the website. A petition to change an approved study abroad proposal must be completed by the student and

signed by the major adviser. Adding another approved program in the same country to one's list need only be submitted, in writing, to the Director of International Programs. However, a change of major may require submission of a new JYA application. If you change your major and do not resubmit to CLP, your JYA status may be revoked.

Vassar Status While on "Leave of Absence" (JYA)

Students who have been given permission to participate in a study abroad program may not register for courses at Vassar for the term(s) approved, nor will they be assigned housing. Those who choose to withdraw from study abroad status the semester prior to expected departure should do so before room draw and the beginning of registration in order to be assigned a draw number and housing for the following term. Once withdrawn, it is not possible to reinstate one's study abroad status.

Conditions for Approval and Provisional Approval

Conditions for provisional approvals for study away must be met by the end of the sophomore year or the leave will not be granted. Provisional approvals normally will not extend into the junior year. If necessary, individual cases will be reviewed by CLP. Students with a grade of INC on their academic records and those on academic probation, under disciplinary censure, or with outstanding financial obligations to the college are not allowed to go JYA. If the Committee on Leaves and Privileges has granted a student permission to go JYA and the student then falls into one of the above categories, JYA status will be automatically revoked. The student may reapply for JYA provided the prior impediment is removed.

Financial Aid

Vassar scholarships apply to study abroad: having been approved for study abroad, financial aid students submit an online budget worksheet to the Financial Aid Office in the semester prior to their departure. These budgets must be accompanied with appropriate documentation, i.e., airfare, program costs, etc. For more information, see the Financial Aid Office website at <http://admissions.vassar.edu/financial-aid/>.

Each semester, the Financial Aid Office host Financial Aid Budget workshops for students on financial aid who will be away the following semester. At this meeting, methods of payment and the instructions on how to complete the financial aid budget sheets, among other things, are explained. If budgets are submitted late, programs may not be paid, and students may thus jeopardize their study abroad experience.

JYA Financial Procedures

When studying abroad, students pay Vassar tuition and receive Vassar credit. Vassar considers charges for expenses that are required as part of the academic program (*i.e.* cultural events or field work that the program considers necessary to the academic program) as part of tuition. Program tuition is billed to Vassar, not to the student. Students are responsible for room and board fees and any other unique program charges. All fees must be paid in full in order for the JYA transfer credit to be applied to a student's Vassar transcript.

Students pay any program application fees and non-refundable advance deposits directly to the program. Vassar credits students with the amount of any advance tuition deposit when the program does not. In order for an accurate bill to be sent by the Student Accounts Office, students must inform the JYA Office, in a timely manner, which program they will be attending.

Cancellations, Emergency or Otherwise

Students who wish to cancel their plans to study abroad may return to campus until the end of the Add period each semester. Such a decision requires careful consultation with the program director, the Office of International Programs, and major adviser at Vassar. Late cancellations may entail difficulties in course registration, financial aid, and, perhaps, housing, which the Office of International Programs and the Dean of Studies Office will do their best to smooth out. There is also no guarantee that the programs themselves will refund in full, nor that credit will be awarded for partially completed coursework. You must notify the JYA office if you change your plans to ensure that you will be eligible to register for classes on campus and be assigned housing if needed.

Passports and Visas

You must have a valid passport before you can begin the visa application process. **If you do not have a passport you should start the application process as soon as you are approved. If you have a passport, be sure it is valid for six months beyond the date you expect to return from abroad.** The requirements for student visas vary from country to country, so allow sufficient time for processing your visa application. This cannot be a last minute procedure. Most foreign consular representatives are located in principal cities and, in many cases a student may be required to obtain a visa from the consular office in the area of his/her permanent residence. A link to the Department of State Foreign Entry Requirements is on the menu of the JYA website. Another website, <http://www.embassy.org>, provides additional information.

Health and Safety Guidelines

All participants should endeavor to insure their own personal health and safety. Read all program material carefully. Make available to the program director all physical and mental health information that is necessary for a safe experience. Inform parents and guardians of all relevant study abroad information. Obtain and maintain appropriate insurance policies. Understand and comply with the laws of the host country and behave in a respectful manner. Travel Warnings, Public Announcements and Consular Information Sheets from the Department of State are posted on the Study Abroad website. We abide by US State Department warnings on travel. It is the responsibility of the student to be fully informed of political and health developments in their foreign country of study.

Health and Accident Insurance

All students participating in a Vassar or non-Vassar program will be billed for health insurance through Vassar. If you are covered by the Vassar Health Insurance a plan, you are automatically covered for emergency evacuation and repatriation of remains. If you do not enroll in the Vassar health insurance, you must waive the coverage online as instructed in your bill from Student Accounts and you will be billed separately for the mandatory emergency evacuation and repatriation of remains insurance.

Gallagher-Koster Insurance also offers an optional Student Care Abroad Medical Insurance Plan that gives additional coverage for students who are temporarily pursuing educational activities outside of their home country. Please discuss your healthcare needs with your family to make sure that you have adequate coverage while you are away. You can visit Koster's website at <http://www.studentcare.com> for further information.

Emergency Contact Information

All students studying abroad must submit Emergency Contact Information to the Dean of Students Office, before leaving campus. This form will be available online for you to complete. Please note that The Office of International Programs cannot pay your program tuition until the College has the Emergency Contact Information on file.

Post-Study Abroad

Transferring Credit from Study Abroad Programs

While all JYA grades appear on the Vassar transcript, only those grades earned on Vassar directed programs are calculated into the Vassar GPA. For non-Vassar programs, all courses and grades appear, but only grades of “C” or better will be awarded credit. While transfer credit doesn't count toward the total number of ungraded units a student may take, it will reduce the total number he/she is allowed, as one may not elect more than 25% of all work taken on campus as ungraded or NRO. Thus, if a student brings in the maximum of 10 units of transfer credit, he/she would then take 24 units on campus towards graduation, which would permit 6 units of ungraded work rather than the normal 8.5. Students who study abroad should be sure to work this out before the senior year so that they don't run into problems with graduation requirements.

The Registrar has established semester or credit hour equivalencies to Vassar's unit system. However, the precise number of units a student receives often depends on how the courses and hours are listed on the transcript and how many credit hours are awarded per course by the host institution.

Due to the nature of the transfer credit process, the Vassar course equivalents listed on the transcript may not correspond exactly to course names listed on the leave transcript.

Additionally, credit cannot be given for courses that have substantial overlap with other previously credited work. Questions of overlap are taken to the Committee on Leaves and Privileges. Please note that one term of an introductory language will not transfer for full credit; intensive language study for one term will be considered for transfer on a case by case basis.

Students who enter Vassar as freshmen are allowed a maximum of 10 units of transfer credit, including any Advanced Placement credits awarded. Normally, a year abroad will earn at least a full year's worth of credit--anywhere from 7 to 10 units--and many study abroad participants earn the maximum. All course work taken abroad on a JYA leave must be shown on the Vassar transcript. Therefore, a student who wishes to earn summer credits, or who brings in pre-enrollment credit (including AP) as a freshman, may find that he/she is not able to apply all the pre-enrollment transfer credit earned towards graduation.

Counting Courses Towards Your Major

It is important to stay in touch with your major adviser while you are studying abroad especially when you are registering for your program courses. You are expected to respect the content of your original course selection as outlined in your Permission to Study Abroad application. If your stated courses are not available at the time of registration, you should consult with your major adviser to determine appropriate substitutions especially if you need the transfer units to count towards your major. It is up to the Chair of your department as to whether your courses taken abroad will be considered for your major requirements.