

## Planning for Education Abroad

### **Why Should I Study Abroad?**

Integrating an education abroad experience into your time as a Vassar student may reap many rewards. This unique opportunity to learn and live abroad for a semester or an academic year may offer access to new classes, the opportunity to gain a new perspective in your field of study, and the chance to develop or master language skills. Students often report improvements in their confidence and problem solving abilities after returning from time abroad, in addition to increased cultural competence and the ability to work well in diverse environments. Such growth is personally rewarding, but also valuable to future employers and graduate schools.

### **When Should I Study Abroad?**

At Vassar, students are eligible to go abroad during their Junior year and, in some cases, during the first semester of Senior year. Therefore, the process to apply for permission to study abroad takes place in fall of the Sophomore year. Students should meet with their major adviser to determine whether you should apply for a semester or a year abroad. In certain cases, required courses for the major may only be offered in a specific semester and therefore this may determine which semester fits your overall academic plan. Ordinarily, requests for back to back semester leaves in two different countries are not considered. 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 Office of International Programs (hereafter referred to as OIP) oversees student participation in semester and academic year programming. Students wishing to study abroad during summer or winter term pursue these options independently and should be sure to consult the Registrar and relevant academic department(s) regarding transfer of credits. It is also important to keep in mind that Vassar's financial aid policy regarding study abroad does not apply to summer or winter. For more information on that policy, see the next section and please consult the OIP website.

### **How Can I Fund my Study Abroad?**

Vassar believes that education abroad is a valuable academic experience that should be accessible to all students. Financial Aid, including Vassar scholarships, may generally be applied to study abroad program costs. It is still important to consider, though, that many study abroad programs involve expenses in addition to the regular expenses associated with attending the home institution such as personal spending and travel. The cost of food and daily living expenses may vary significantly when comparing education abroad programs. Therefore, it is important to consult with the OIP and the Office of Financial Aid as you are planning to fund your education abroad experience. In addition to accessing financial aid including Vassar scholarships, you may be eligible for a number of study abroad scholarship opportunities such as the Gilman Scholarship or the Fund for Education Abroad scholarships. The OIP, in partnership with the Fellowships office, is eager to support you in such applications.

# Vassar College

Office of International Programs (OIP)

**Home tuition policy:** When studying abroad, all students pay Vassar tuition in order to 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 to both Vassar and the program must be paid in full in order for the transfer credit to be applied to a student's Vassar transcript. Some programs require students to pay 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 on their Vassar account.

**Using financial aid on study abroad:** students who are using any form of financial aid are required to submit an online budget worksheet to the Financial Aid Office in the semester prior to their departure. Each semester, the Financial Aid Office hosts Financial Aid Budget workshops for those students who will be away the following semester. These budgets are used to determine the total cost of attendance for your program and must be accompanied by appropriate documentation, i.e., airfare, program costs, etc. For more information, see the Services for Financial Aid Office website at <http://admissions.vassar.edu/financial-aid/>.

## How do I Choose my Study Abroad Program?

It is important to do some upfront thinking about your personal, academic and professional goals while planning a semester or a year abroad. You might start by asking, why do you want to study abroad? Do you want to enhance your language skills or improve your intercultural communications skills? Are you interested in exploring a different pedagogical system to foster your intellectual growth? Do you want to immerse yourself in an unfamiliar culture to gain perspective in a world that is becoming more connected economically, politically, and socially?

In choosing a location to study, you should consider whether you want to be in a dense urban area or another type of environment. While cities like Rome and London have a broad appeal for many students, sometimes choosing a less obvious education abroad destination will lead you to a different kind of experience. Large cities can offer many exciting cultural opportunities but they may also be more expensive and impersonal. A smaller urban center or rural location may offer more contact with local residents and the opportunity to experience a way of life found only in that particular country. While fewer than ten percent of U.S. students go abroad to Asian, African, or Latin American countries, an increasing number of Vassar students elect to study in these locations. Vassar has an extensive list of approved programs around the globe.

Vassar offers a number of its own education abroad programs that we encourage you to consider, in addition to over one hundred other approved programs. The full list of programs, where you can search for programs by specific criteria such as country, language of study, or particular subjects can be found at <http://globallearning.vassar.edu/>

Interested students should attend one of the General Information Sessions held in September to learn about the procedures and application for permission to study abroad. The office also organizes an Education Abroad Fair that takes place in October before the break that gives students an opportunity to engage with representatives from over 20 frequently used program providers. Additional program information sessions take place throughout the semester and are announced on the office's web site.

# Vassar College

Office of International Programs (OIP)

## How do Credits Transfer from Study Abroad?

All coursework abroad must be taken for a letter grade; and the letter grades will appear on your Vassar transcript. Only those grades earned on Vassar directed programs are calculated into the Vassar GPA. For non-Vassar programs, all courses and grades will appear on the transcript, but only grades of “C” or better will be awarded transfer credit. 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 program transcript.

Please note the following restrictions:

- Credit will not be awarded for courses that have substantial overlap with other previously credited work.
- Credit will not be awarded for pre-professional (non-liberal arts) coursework.
- Credit will not be awarded for internships unless specifically approved by the OIP (under guidance from the Committee on Leaves and Privileges) and relevant academic department.
- One term of an introductory language will transfer as a half unit; credit equivalents for intensive language study for one term will be evaluated on a case by case basis.

## Can I fulfill Major Requirements while Studying Abroad?

It is up to the Chair of your department as to whether your courses taken abroad will be considered for your major requirements. 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 proposal as outlined in your permission to study abroad application. If your proposed 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.

**\*\*Before you study abroad, it is important to also carefully review the “Academic Policies for Education Abroad” document available on the OIP website for more details on these academic matters.\*\***

## How do I Apply for Study Abroad?

Applying for study abroad is a two-stage process at Vassar. First, you will need to submit an application for permission to study abroad to the Committee on Leaves and Privileges. For sophomores, the application period opens at the beginning of October, and the deadline for submitting your application regardless of whether you plan to spend a full year or a single semester away (fall or spring), is always the first Monday in December. Proceed to: <https://globallearning.vassar.edu>, navigate to the program that you wish to have permission to attend, and click “apply now.” Students should have a clear idea of their proposal for study abroad and so usually only one application is warranted. In certain cases, where your first choice is a particularly competitive program, you may be advised to also apply for permission to attend a second program. Please consult the OIP for further advice on this topic in consideration of your particular circumstances.

# Vassar College

Office of International Programs (OIP)

Once the Committee on Leaves and Privileges has approved your application for permission to study abroad, you must then proceed to the next step of completing your actual program specific application. Please note that requirements and deadlines will vary for this second stage.

## What are the Vassar Application Requirements?

- **Demonstrate a recommended cumulative and major GPA of 3.2**

- **Declare Your Major**

In order to apply for permission to study abroad, you must first declare your major and be assigned a major adviser. It is advisable that you do this early in the semester since departments and faculty may not have the time to devote to help you later in the semester. The courses that you intend to take while abroad should be integrated into your overall plan for fulfilling both your major and graduation requirements. Second majors and/or correlate sequences do not have to be declared until the end of the first phase of pre-registration of the first semester of your senior year.

If you are declaring a multi-disciplinary major, it is possible that your major approval may not be granted before the study abroad deadline but will be approved by the time the Committee on Leaves and Privileges meets in January. In this case, you will need to confirm with the OIP that you have submitted a complete proposal to the program director.

Once you have declared, you should set up a meeting with your adviser to discuss your goals and academic plan for study abroad.

- **Submit a Personal Statement**

Your personal statement is one of the most important parts of your permission to study abroad application. This is your opportunity to reveal to the committee your motivation to study abroad. You should include personal details as well as information about your academic interests and future goals that help explain the reasoning behind why and where you wish to study abroad. Make sure that you convey that you have exercised due diligence in selecting your program and proposed courses by including specific information about the program and how your choices support your academic plan.

- **Demonstrate Academic Preparation**

You will be asked to submit information on the coursework you have taken thus far that has helped you prepare for your proposed study abroad experience. In order to take full advantage of the academic opportunities offered by your study abroad program, the Committee on Leaves and Privileges expects you to have carefully prepared for your time abroad by taking courses that are directly relevant to your proposed program. In addition to any language requirements that may serve this purpose, the area studies requirement is particularly important for study abroad in Africa, Latin America or Asia to understand the cultural, geographical and historical context for your semester or year abroad.

# Vassar College

Office of International Programs (OIP)

## ➤ **Demonstrate thoughtful Plan for Coursework Abroad**

In the application, you will be asked to list the courses that you propose to take while abroad. This will require some research on your part to determine which programs offer the types of courses you are interested in taking. You should consult with your major adviser to determine the courses, if any, that you will need to count towards your major. Please be aware that some course listings may not be published at the time you are submitting your application. Therefore, it may be necessary to use more general categories, such as 19<sup>th</sup> c. British Literature or Politics of the Middle East. Regardless, CLP expects you to adhere to the spirit of your plans as outlined in your application. Any substantial changes made at the time of actual course registration will have to be made in consultation with your major adviser's approval with details provided in writing to the OIP.

## ➤ **Request Major Adviser and Faculty Recommendations**

All students applying for permission to study abroad will need to request recommendations from both their major adviser and a faculty member with whom you have taken a class. Please note that it is alright if you have not had a class with your major adviser. In any case, the recommendations must be from two different faculty members. If your proposed coursework is to be undertaken in a language other than English, you will also need to request an additional recommendation from your language faculty.

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 it is for you. Therefore, please make sure that you request your recommendations well in advance of the deadline. While the online application will prompt your faculty to complete the recommendations, you should check with them in person first to make sure that they are willing and able to complete the form.
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 adviser. 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 sharing a draft of your personal statement. The more material you provide your adviser with, the more fruitful your conversations will be.
3. If you have declared a double major by the time you are ready to submit your application, then you will need to provide a second major adviser recommendation.

## **I Have Been Denied or *Provisionally* Approved to Study Abroad – What Does that Mean?**

While it is the case that most students are approved for study abroad, there may be instances where a student is denied permission. If your application is denied and you wish to understand the reason why, you should make an appointment with the Director of International Programs since he or she may be able to give you further insight into the committee's decision.

In some cases, a student will receive approval for study abroad, pending their completion of certain requirements (a provisional approval). The requirements will be described in your decision letter. Conditions for provisional approvals for study away must be met by the end of the sophomore year or

# Vassar College

Office of International Programs (OIP)

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.

Please also note that 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 will not be allowed to study abroad. If the Committee on Leaves and Privileges has granted you permission to study abroad and you then fall into one of the above categories, your status will be automatically revoked. The student may appeal the decision provided the prior impediment is removed. Please consult with the OIP before you submit your appeal.

## **I Have been Approved to Study Abroad – What’s Next?**

Once the Committee on Leaves and Privileges has approved your application for permission to study abroad, you must then proceed to the next step of completing your actual program specific application. Please note that requirements and deadlines will vary for this second stage. You will also be required to complete several “post-decision” requirements in your Vassar application portal in the form of required reading or brief questionnaires. If you sought permission for two programs and were approved for both, once you have finalized your decision, you should withdraw your application from the program that you will not be attending so that the OIP is up to date on your plans. Deadlines corresponding with these actions will be communicated to you via messages from the OIP.

Take Note: Once you have been granted permission to participate in an education abroad program, you are not allowed to register for courses at Vassar for the term(s) approved, nor will you be assigned campus housing. If you decide to withdraw your study abroad application during the semester prior to your expected departure you should do so before room draw and the end of registration in order to be assigned a draw number and housing and register for classes for the following semester. Once your application is formally withdrawn, it is not possible to reinstate your study abroad status.

## **How do I make a Change to an Approved Education Abroad Plan?**

If you wish to make a substantial change to your education abroad plan after you have been approved—such as changes of country, major changes in proposed course-work, and/or to one's academic focus must be submitted in writing to the Committee on Leaves and Privileges using the appropriate petition form that you must request from the OIP.

Deadlines for changes to an approved study abroad program are March 1 for Fall term and October 1 for Spring term.

# Vassar College

Office of International Programs (OIP)

## Other Practical Matters

### Cancellations, Emergency or Otherwise

Students who wish to cancel their plans to study abroad may return to campus until the end of the first week of classes at the beginning of each semester. Such a decision requires careful consultation with the program director, the OIP, and major adviser at Vassar. Late cancellations may entail difficulties in course registration, financial aid, and, perhaps, housing. 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 OIP immediately 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

In order to study abroad, you must have a valid passport. 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. You should read carefully any information or instructions concerning visas that your study abroad program provides for you.

### Health and Safety

All participants should endeavor to insure their own personal health and safety while abroad. Read all program material carefully. Disclose to your program director any physical and mental health information so that they can provide assistance in the case of an emergency. 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 Advisories from the Department of State and Center for Disease Control Health Information Pages relevant to your destination(s) of study must be reviewed and considered carefully. It is the responsibility of the student to be fully informed of political and health developments in their destination(s) of study.

All students participating in study abroad will be billed for study abroad health insurance. For more information on this topic, please consult the OIP website.

### Keep in Touch!

Thinking ahead...keep in mind that we'd love to hear from you while you are on study abroad. Email us or use the hashtag #VassarAbroad to share the story of your learning experience with the Vassar community!