
Study Abroad and Language Learning

By providing opportunities to enhance cross-cultural and language skills, study abroad prepares American students to assume leadership roles in our increasingly interdependent global economy.

Studying abroad enhances employability. Sixty-five per cent of Fortune 1000 executives agree that knowledge of other cultures and international issues is vital for college and career success.¹ In addition, recent studies show that students who studied abroad exhibited better problem solving, increased creativity, and more complex thoughts than their peers who did not study abroad.² Graduates who studied or interned abroad were also found to gain short and long-term employment benefits. Specifically, those with international experience were “half as likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with those who have not studied or trained abroad and, five years after graduation, their unemployment rate is 23 per cent lower.”³ Study abroad, therefore, contributes to the career trajectories of American undergraduates, and also strengthens the U.S. economy.

And yet, just 10 per cent of American undergraduates study abroad before graduating, according to 2015 data from the Institute for International Education (IIE).⁴ The U.S. remains the top host country for international students but lags behind in sending students abroad, with limited federal funding to support students’ international experiences.

LANGUAGE LEARNING AND STUDY ABROAD FOR AMERICANS:

Many study abroad experiences support and enhance the development of language skills among American students, enhancing their employability in an increasingly global workforce. Study abroad provides students with the opportunity to interact with native speakers, enhancing their vocabulary, grammar, and other conversational skills. A recent study found that more than 80 per cent of employers agreed foreign language proficiency is an important factor to consider when recruiting young college graduates.⁵ Study abroad is an invaluable experience for American students that can provide participants with not only language skills, but the cultural context to use the language effectively.

DIVERSITY AND STUDY ABROAD FOR AMERICANS:

¹ MetLife survey, 2011 (<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED519278.pdf>)

² Time magazine, 2014 (<http://time.com/79937/how-studying-or-working-abroad-makes-you-smarter/>)

³ Erasmus impact study, 2014 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf)

⁴ Open Doors report, 2015 (<http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors>)

⁵ Erasmus impact study, 2014 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf)

The study abroad community has engaged in efforts to increase diversity in ethnicity, disciplines, and destinations in U.S. study abroad. These efforts have multifaceted importance: increasing access for all American students to experience the personal benefits of studying abroad; ensuring that upcoming generations of Americans have a deeper understanding of other nations; and establishing an accurate representation abroad of the full diversity of American society.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

[The Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program](#), sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, continues to be an important facet of these diversification efforts, providing scholarships of up to \$5,000 to American students of limited financial means. Gilman recipients reflect the full diversity of American society, with higher minority student representation than national study abroad numbers:

- 42 per cent of Gilman recipients are first-generation college students;
- 82 per cent of Gilman recipients are the first in their family to study abroad;
- 73 per cent of Gilman recipients are ethnic minorities (compared to 24 per cent nationally); and
- 5 per cent of Gilman recipients identify as having disabilities.

Additionally, the Gilman program contributes to America's public diplomacy, national security, and bilateral interests abroad by encouraging students to study in non-traditional study abroad locations. 71 per cent of Gilman scholarship recipients studied outside of Western Europe (compared to 50 per cent nationally).⁶ The diversification of study abroad locations for American students, such as that supported by the Gilman program, opens the door for new, mutual international partnerships with key regions.

The [Critical Languages Scholarship \(CLS\)](#) is an overseas language and cultural immersion program for American undergraduate and graduate students who seek to broaden the base of Americans studying and mastering critical languages. CLS builds relationships between the people of the United States and other countries by providing study opportunities to a diverse range of students from across the United States at every level of language learning. CLS provides opportunities to study languages including Arabic, Azerbaijani, Bangla/Bengali, Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Punjabi, Russian, Turkish, and Urdu.

⁶ Institute of International Education, 2014-15 (<http://www.iie.org/en/Programs/Gilman-Scholarship-Program/About-the-Program/Program-Statistics>)

**OTHER FEDERALLY FUNDED STUDY ABROAD OPPORTUNITIES FOR AMERICANS
(DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE):**

[David L. Boren Scholarships](#) provide unique funding opportunities for U.S. undergraduates to study abroad in countries critical to U.S. national security and underrepresented by U.S. study abroad. NSEP has awarded more than 3,300 undergraduate scholarships and supported the study of more than 75 languages in more than 80 countries.

[David L. Boren Fellowships](#) allow U.S. graduate students to add a unique international and language component to their education through specialization in area study, language study, or increased language proficiency. Boren Fellowships focus on less commonly taught languages and world regions critical to U.S. national security. NSEP has awarded nearly 2,000 fellowships for more than 100 languages in more than 120 countries.

[The Language Flagship](#) is a national effort to change the way Americans learn languages, addressing the urgent and growing need for U.S. students, across disciplines, to advance to professional levels of competency in languages critical to national security. Flagship programs provide advanced language training and overseas intensive study in languages including Arabic, Chinese, Hindi/Urdu, Korean, Portuguese, Persian, Russian, Swahili, and Turkish.