

RESTORE, GROW, AND DIVERSIFY U.S. STUDY ABROAD PARTICIPATION

All graduates from a U.S. college or university should possess the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in the global economy and study abroad is an effective means to achieving this end. Research demonstrates the benefits of study abroad for U.S. students: increased graduation rates, higher grade point averages, and the intangible positives of experiencing a different culture.¹ More recent studies illustrate employers' value of a globally educated workforce. A NAFSA study published last year found that employers associate the key soft skills acquired and developed through study abroad with management and leadership, among other qualities.² 86 percent of U.S. employers believe their business would increase if more of their staff had international experience.³ Despite these proven benefits, less than 10 percent of U.S. college students study abroad before they graduate, meaning that 90 percent of graduates are entering the workforce without the international skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to position them for success in the global economy.⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted U.S. higher education, and study abroad especially. Although some colleges and universities were able to resume limited programming this year (either in-person or virtual), the number of U.S. college students participating in study abroad during the 2020-2021 academic year is well below previous years due to current travel risks and limited funding. As a result, American students are losing a key component of their education and colleges and universities are losing an important source of revenue. Without additional financial and policy support, it could take years for study abroad to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels, which was already lagging behind other industrialized nations. This will leave U.S. students with fewer international education opportunities, U.S. higher education institutions with fewer international collaborations, and our country less prepared to tackle global challenges or compete in the global marketplace.

Congress can help restore, grow, and diversify study abroad participation in the following ways:

- **Ensure the revival of U.S. study abroad programs impacted by COVID-19 by supporting new or increased funding in FY2022 for the following programs:**
 - **The [Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students \(IDEAS\) grant program](#) run by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)**
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was considerable interest in

¹ https://www.usg.edu/assets/cassie/documents/Study_Abroad_National_Sample_CASSIE_Infographic.pdf

² <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/developing-globally-competitive-workforce-through-study-abroad>

³ https://www.nafsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/simon_program_infographic.pdf

⁴ <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/trends-us-study-abroad>

increasing institutional capacity for study abroad programming. Many programs at U.S. colleges and universities rely on fees and with fewer students currently studying abroad due to the pandemic, operating budgets have diminished considerably. As U.S. higher education recovers from the pandemic, it will be challenging to restart programs quickly without additional funding opportunities provided by grant programs like IDEAS.

➤ **Virtual exchange programs, such as the [Stevens Initiative](#) funded by ECA**

Increasing funding for virtual exchange would allow higher education institutions to continue to offer intercultural exchange programs for their students and maintain international partnerships and agreements while there may still be travel restrictions or a general hesitancy to travel by students, faculty and staff.

➤ **The U.S. Department of Education's [Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education](#) (FIPSE) to support innovation in study abroad**

For higher education to fully recover and be able to serve the needs of U.S. students after this global crisis, new models for study abroad will need to be developed, new partnerships will need to be formed, and new opportunities will need to be created. Establishing funding in FIPSE consistent with the Simon Study Abroad Program Act (see below) will provide higher education institutions much needed support to develop innovative programs and study abroad models that will allow them to adapt to the changing reality of global mobility in the post-COVID-19 education landscape.

• **Support the passage of the [Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act](#)**

Introduced in nearly every Congress since 2006 with bipartisan support, the legislation would allow U.S. colleges and universities to increase the number and diversity of students who complete a study abroad experience prior to graduation and enhance their future employability. Inspired by the vision of the late U.S. Senator Paul Simon of Illinois and the recommendations of the congressionally-appointed Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, the bill would establish a competitive grant program for U.S. higher education institutions and advance four goals:

- One million U.S. college students will study abroad annually for academic credit within 10 years
- The diversity of study abroad participants will reflect the U.S. undergraduate population
- A significantly greater proportion of study abroad will occur in non-traditional destinations outside of Europe
- Higher education institutions will make study abroad a critical component of a quality higher education