

GLOBAL EDUCATION RESEARCH REPORTS



Supporting Pathways for First-Generation Students to Study Abroad

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FOREWORD

“I want to be the person or advisor I didn’t have.”

I was talking with Alexandra Cintron Jimenez, a higher education professional who was the first in her family to study abroad when she made this timely statement. This approach has guided my own advocacy for and work with first-generation students.

This paper is not a call to consider the experiences of first-generation students through a deficit lens. First-gen students arrive to higher education because of and/or despite their lived experiences. Rather, the models and practices presented provide a foundation for international educators to consider the diverse experiences of first-generation students; raise awareness of global education opportunities; and support them before, during, and after study abroad.

Perhaps the lack of a consistent definition of the term “first-generation college student” can challenge us to expand our reach and mechanisms for support. I recognize—and appreciate—institutions increasingly investing in programming and community-making to engage first-generation students. As a first-gen student, navigating the “hidden curriculum”—the practices that make higher education institutions go round—felt like a (non-credit bearing, time-consuming) course in and of itself, especially when it came to international opportunities. Less than 10% of first-gen students study abroad. While I recognize mine was just one first-gen experience—as we are a hugely diverse and intersectional demographic—my experiences learning about and pursuing study abroad make me appreciative of the roles a few key folks—faculty (not in the study abroad office) and staff, at my home institutions and my program provider—played in me realizing my study abroad goals. The encouragement I received and the support I was given (financially and otherwise) should not be an anomaly and cannot be if we are truly dedicated to making higher and international education a more equitable and accessible space for first-generation students.

This paper underscores the importance of programming, education, and scholarship practitioners working together to provide entry points into and funding opportunities for global education for first-generation students. In our work with first-gen college students, let’s aim to be the champions they need at pivotal times in their personal and professional pathways. Let’s work collectively to address holistically the challenges facing first-generation students—which are, inevitably, the challenges facing many students, given the intersectional identities of first-generation students and the problems the pandemic has posed. Let’s recognize where we can fill in gaps left by current practices, informed by the perspectives of first-gen graduates; new models of engagement will strengthen our relationships with first-gen students across institutions, beyond often-under-resourced international offices. Let’s consider that entry into higher education was likely not a given, and not downplay study abroad as another huge step, but one that makes other future ventures like graduate degrees, and career pathways feel more possible. Let’s continue working together to “unhide” curricula, to be the people students need and deserve, to normalize first-generation experiences, and to create communities that are welcoming and inclusive in global education.

Angela Schaffer
Executive Director, Fund for Education Abroad

INTRODUCTION

First-generation college students¹ represent a growing segment of the U.S. higher education population and a group consistently underrepresented in study abroad programming (Cataldi et al., 2018; Rausch, 2017). According to the Consortium for Analysis of Student Success through International Education (CASSIE), only eight percent of first-generation students study abroad, yet those who do are more likely to graduate within six years and have higher GPAs at graduation (Bell et al., 2020).

As U.S. higher education institutions return to offering study abroad programming at this point in the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an opportunity for education abroad leaders to focus on educational equity by examining pathways for underrepresented students to access study abroad. However, focusing on access to study abroad necessitates a closer look at programming and effective practices for highlighting study abroad opportunities to all students, particularly to underrepresented student groups. Researchers have identified studying abroad as a high-impact practice² associated with greater student retention that promotes college completion and benefits all students (Bhatt et al., 2022; Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; Kuh, 2008; Valuy & Shao, 2021).

IIE interviewed staff at five U.S. higher education institutions and two non-profit organizations implementing successful strategies for engaging with first-generation students to share promising practices with the field. This paper synthesizes their perspectives alongside a review of the literature on first-generation students to describe the landscape of study abroad programming designed for first-generation college students. It will then provide an overview of considerations for access to study abroad specific to first-generation students and relevant outcomes. Finally, it will present promising practices and examples from U.S. higher education institutions and study abroad programs to enhance pathways to access study abroad opportunities for first-generation students.

KEY FINDINGS

Study abroad provides first-generation college students with a professional advantage. Advantages include valuable practical experience, professional skills, a stronger resume, and preparation for future career choices. A study abroad experience may also improve a student's competitiveness for jobs or graduate school by helping them to stand out from other candidates.

Financial considerations are first-generation college students' greatest barrier to study abroad participation. According to interview participants, most first-generation students assume the cost of study abroad is beyond their financial means and do not take the time to ask about the costs or possible

¹ A first-generation college student is defined in this paper as an individual whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree.

² High-impact practices are defined by Kuh (2008) as "teaching and learning practices that have significant educational benefits for students who participate in them." The experience facilitates achievement of deep learning, significant engagement gains, and positive differential impact on historically underserved student populations.

funding opportunities. Furthermore, first-generation students often contribute to the economic make-up of their household, limiting their ability to participate in semester or year-long study abroad programming.

Limited resources in some study abroad offices affect the staff's ability to provide customized outreach to underserved student groups. For some institutions, limited resources can create obstacles from the beginning. This starts with identifying who is a first-generation student, thereby affecting their approach to addressing the complex identities of first-generation students. As a result, some institutions struggle to address students' multiple characteristics that intersect in ways that further disadvantage first-generation students. It is valuable to note that recent diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at higher education institutions have prompted greater focus in this area, with some institutions already finding ways to customize study abroad outreach to first-generation students.

Faculty are central figures in the design of global learning activities and support for study abroad. Study abroad offices value partnerships with faculty members who frequently interact with students and can provide information on and encourage first-generation college students to participate in study abroad opportunities. Some faculty act on their commitment to study abroad by designing and leading faculty-led programs. These programs can increase access to study abroad for students at their institution because they are designed with the financial and time constraints of their student body in mind.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on these findings, the following promising practices are intended to highlight possibilities for increasing access to study abroad for first-generation college students.

Institutions can bring greater awareness to study abroad opportunities for first-generation students by ensuring that study abroad is emphasized in the institution's broader internationalization plan. Campus internationalization plans might include partnerships with external programs such as the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship program or the Fund for Education Abroad to support funding first-generation student study abroad programs. Internally, it may include collaboration with faculty to design global learning activities and study abroad programming that inspires and encourages first-generation students to study abroad. Focusing on study abroad as a high-impact practice for first-generation student success can garner greater support across the institution. As a strategic priority, resources and funding may be more readily available to support campus study abroad initiatives.

It is important to demystify the study abroad application process by explaining everything to first-generation students. Interview participants describe the application as the first practical barrier first-generation students face once they have decided to study abroad. They highlighted the need to review every step in the study abroad process in detail with students from the time they first begin asking about programs through their return to campus after going abroad. In many cases, this included assisting students with program, passport, and visa applications, as well as booking airfare and other arrangements for their travel outside of the United States.

Institutions focus on preparing students for their study abroad experience but could enhance monitoring and reflection activities during and after study abroad to better support first-generation students. Interview participants noted that some first-generation students experience unexpected isolation during study abroad if their peers in the program are already familiar with the host country or more adept at navigating travel outside of the United States. Advising appointments throughout the program can help to identify students who need additional support in-country. Continuing activities upon return to the United States, such as re-entry workshops and symposia, can help students to process their experience and learn how to articulate it for future employers.

Sharing images and stories of other first-generation students who studied abroad is a powerful outreach tool that helps students to visualize themselves as someone who can and should study abroad. Interview participants shared that often first-generation students don't realize that studying abroad is an option for them. Connecting students with peers who studied abroad can bring the discussion to a different level and help students understand how to make study abroad possible for them.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a multiple case study analysis (Stake, 2006), wherein a small number of cases were purposely selected to gain greater insight into the attributes and practices of selected organizations and institutions. This approach allowed for the examination of each case independently as well as the comparison of common themes across the interviewed participants.

In May 2022, IIE interviewed staff at five U.S. higher education institutions and two non-profit organizations implementing successful strategies for engaging with first-generation students to share promising practices with the field. These semi-structured interviews aimed to understand the general study abroad programming, outreach initiatives, and support systems at institutions, as well as the impact of study abroad on first-generation students. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for coding and analysis. Transcriptions were coded following an inductive approach to identifying emergent themes. Themes were further compared with a review of recent research focused on first-generation students studying abroad as well as data from IIE programming that emphasizes support for first-generation students.

Participants were selected based on their involvement in the IIE American Passport Program, IIE Generation Study Abroad initiative, and among the IIE Network membership. Institutional type, geographic location, and size were additional criteria for selecting institutions. To represent the broadest spectrum of U.S. higher education institutions, IIE interviewed one community college representative, two minority-serving institution representatives, and two public institution representatives.

DEFINING FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

First-generation students comprise nearly one-third of college undergraduates (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Skomsvold, 2015), although this has been contended due to the variation of definitions used across institutions, research, and organizations. The term first-generation student emerged in the early 1980s as researchers sought to identify a growing segment of underserved students in the U.S. higher education population. An amendment to the U.S. Higher Education Act of 1965 defines a first-generation college student for the Federal Trio Program as “an individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree” or “in the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree.” A recent study by the Center for First-Generation Student Success, notes that many U.S. higher education institutions adopted the TRIO definition to receive funding and facilitate related data reporting (Whitley et al., 2018). However, variations of this definition include distinctions between biological parents and guardians, four-year and two-year colleges, and institutions located outside of the United States as well as consideration for siblings’ or extended family members’ college attendance (Darrah et al., 2022). The broad variation in defining a first-generation student across and within institutions has implications for the funding, services, and overall support provided to them.

STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMMING

As study abroad programming increased in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions began adapting programs to meet the demands and interests of diverse U.S. higher education students (Martel et al., 2019). While first-generation students are eligible for numerous U.S. government scholarship programs, such as the Fulbright, David L. Boren Scholarship, and Critical Language Scholarship Programs, this section provides an overview of study abroad programming, scholarships, and initiatives aimed at increasing first-generation college students’ participation in study abroad.



THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S BENJAMIN A. GILMAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM provides study abroad funding for U.S.

students with high financial need. Students are encouraged to study or intern in non-traditional destinations around the world. Since 2001, the program has provided more than 34,000 undergraduate students with funds for studying abroad. In the 2020-2021 academic year, 58 percent of these students were first-generation college students.



IIE'S GENERATION STUDY ABROAD INITIATIVE launched in 2014 as a five-year initiative to double participation in U.S. study abroad. By mobilizing resources and convening key stakeholders, IIE supported the individual goals set by higher education institutions to increase and diversify the number of U.S. students studying abroad from their campus. With an emphasis on reaching new student populations and increasing student diversity, 63 percent of institutions reported focusing on study abroad initiatives for first-generation students (IIE, 2021). Institutions implemented a range of supports, including scholarship funding, customized programs, study abroad fairs, and campus campaigns.



IIE'S AMERICAN PASSPORT PROJECT, launched in 2021, grew out of IIE's Generation Study Abroad Initiative. The project funds U.S. colleges and universities in the IIE Network to support Pell-grant eligible students to obtain a U.S. passport. Each year the initiative will fund passports for 1,000 students. Established to promote access to and equity in study abroad, 70 percent of the institutions receiving funding from the IIE American Passport Project plan to target first-generation students on their campus and provide support for both the passport and study abroad processes.



THE FUND FOR EDUCATION ABROAD (FEA) is an independent scholarship provider supporting underrepresented students interested in studying abroad. FEA has provided more than \$2.5 million in scholarship funds to 867 undergraduates studying around the world since 2010. More than 70 percent of FEA scholarship recipients identify as first-generation college students. FEA supports students throughout the study abroad program through peer mentors, blog writing, and networking opportunities focused on students' future career goals.



DIVERSITY ABROAD aims to support underrepresented students by creating equitable access to global education. It accomplishes this through a comprehensive website of informational resources and scholarships complemented by various activities designed to engage students and higher education professionals. A few noteworthy activities include a Global Student Leadership Summit, a Professional Membership Consortium, and the annual Diversity Abroad Conference highlighting access, diversity, and equity in global education.



AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR FOREIGN STUDY, through its program AIFS Abroad, offers a wide variety of semester, summer, J-term, and faculty-led programs as well as

internships geared to first-generation students. With over 60 global programs, AIFS Abroad provides comprehensive features including flight arrangements, meals, and housing with scholarships available for first-generation students. The majority of programs are located in the UK and Europe with others as far-reaching as Japan and New Zealand.

In addition to initiatives outlined previously, many universities have dedicated scholarship funds to support first-generation students. Institutional representatives also noted that many faculty-led programs are designed with the intent to increase accessibility. For example, some faculty-led programs are short-duration, allowing students to fit them in during school breaks or amidst family obligations. Faculty-led programming has the added benefit of being led by someone who the students already know and trust, who can identify and encourage student participation, and who can support students throughout the experience, from preparing to go abroad to unpacking the experience upon return to the classroom. Faculty-led programs can be offered in coordination with third-party providers such as the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) Customized Faculty-Led programs. These programs provide logistical services and support, allowing faculty members to focus on academic programming.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS TO ACCESS STUDY ABROAD AND OUTCOMES

Researchers have documented the challenges first-generation college students face at U.S. higher education institutions (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012; Watts et al., 2022). In addition to institutional, financial, and cultural barriers at an institution, first-generation college students encounter additional barriers to study abroad access (Lopez-McGee et al., 2018). These barriers range from family obligations and concerns about degree completion to a perception that studying abroad is not designed for them or a viable option in their academic plan.

However, research shows that first-generation college students who participate in a study abroad experience benefit from social, academic, and professional growth (Dean & Kelly, 2020; Valuy & Shao, 2022). Benefits to first-generation college students include increased likelihood of college completion, improved academic performance, and enhanced practical and social skills.

This section provides an overview of the considerations education abroad leaders need to be aware of when aiming to enhance first-generation students' access to study abroad opportunities. This section also provides research and evidence on the outcomes and impacts of study abroad for first-generation students.

BARRIERS

Participants interviewed by IIE described three main challenges for the first-generation students on their campus to access study abroad: financial concerns, familial support, and the complexity of their identity.



FINANCIAL

Many first-generation students do not consider studying abroad in their academic planning because they assume it is beyond their financial means. As a result, several participants felt that first-generation students do not seek to learn about the financial details or possible scholarships available for study abroad. Yet, from the institutional perspective, “you don’t want to stereotype and say, well anyone who’s first-gen is also high need, We do outreach in a different way, for our high financial need students, they come to our Gilman workshop. We have different offices like pathways.”

The interview participants described the multitude of ways they typically address outreach and support for study abroad to students with high financial need regardless of their status as first-generation students. In addition to recommending one-on-one sessions between a study abroad advisor and student to focus on their individual needs, institutions created dedicated resources. They implemented workshop sessions to highlight scholarships and clarify the financial arrangements needed to study abroad at their institution. Discussions during these sessions are important, as Goldstein and Lopez (2021) found that although first-generation students had opportunities to receive scholarships for studying abroad, they were still concerned about funding the experience.

Institutions noted that some first-generation students are primary contributors to the economic make-up of their families and are therefore unable to take advantage of longer-duration study abroad programming. Study abroad programs of two weeks or less were frequently mentioned as more accessible to students because they limited the financial expenditure needed to participate in the program and the time away from work obligations.



FAMILIAL SUPPORT

A lack of familial support may make first-generation students feel uncertain or opt not to study abroad. Pascarella et al. (2004) found that first-generation students were often more closely connected to family and more likely to live off-campus and manage family obligations. Some participants mentioned that parents might be unaware of the value and impact of a study abroad experience on their child’s academic and professional outcomes. When family views the purpose of attending college as earning a degree that will then allow you to get a good job, the idea of traveling abroad does not seem practical or link to the end goal from their perspective. And since their family members have not had an academic study abroad experience, there are likely no role models for study abroad in a first-generation student’s immediate family. As a result, students are missing critical support and encouragement to prepare them before studying abroad, but also during and after the experience for those who go abroad. Family commitments and responsibilities such as caregiving and employment also create barriers for first-generation students.

“If it’s not something that the families are encouraging students to look out for, I think students are focusing more on just getting through the coursework. I often think, how are we talking about a study abroad experience in a way that is accessible to students for whom this might not be something they've been hearing about?”

- U.S. Higher Education Institution Representative



IDENTITY

Finally, all participants commented that being a first-generation student is just one of the multiple identities for a student. This is well documented in research on first-generation students, which emphasizes the complexity of first-generation identity and how it intersects with other identifying factors -- such as minority, low-income, LGBTQIA, and more -- creating a diverse group of students and the need to carefully consider how institutions address their needs (Whitley et al. 2018). Given the additional layer of complexity, these identities may overlap in ways that further disadvantage first-generation students. Higher education institutions and organizations that serve college students are often set up to support student groups based on specific characteristics such as students with high financial needs, students who are people of color, or non-traditional age students. However, first-generation students may have all these characteristics, along with their first-generation identity, none of these characteristics, or be somewhere in between. For those working with students, the intersection of these different identities can pose a challenge in designing appropriate support systems for first-generation students.

An additional consideration is how students may react to entering yet another experience where their first-generation identity distinguishes them from other students whose family members may have studied abroad or whose families have traveled to the region of study, giving those students a level of comfort with how to navigate the study abroad experience, and leaving the first-generation students to feel isolated by their lack of experience.

“As a first-gen, low-income student who is a queer multicultural Latina, it was important for me to study abroad in order to explore the complexities of my unique identities. Before studying abroad, I didn’t proudly embrace anything about who I was – especially my queerness. It was this opportunity that allowed me to truly know myself and confidently express pride in all of my complexities.”

- Gilman Scholar to Chile, 2018

BENEFITS

Interview participants described studying abroad as a high-impact practice that provides many benefits to first-generation students, including social, academic, and professional.



SOCIAL

Multiple institutions interviewed described social benefits for students who studied abroad that integrated first-generation students into the broader campus community. For example, one institution described how faculty-led programming strengthened the campus community bond for first-generation students who frequently live off-campus and have work or family responsibilities in addition to their academic studies. Team building activities are incorporated into faculty-led programming with the intention of developing a small family community amongst the participating cohort of students.

Ecker-Lyster and Kardash (2021) concluded that the minoritized students in their study had the opportunity to broaden their outlook and understanding of the world around them. The opportunity to study abroad within an affordable program that targeted minoritized students allowed the participants to embrace the flexibility while being abroad and the opportunity to experience a culture other than their own.

Finally, personal growth was cited frequently by those interviewed for this paper as a benefit of studying abroad. Although this may feel abstract and intangible for some students to understand before their study abroad experience, more than 97% of students describe study abroad as affecting their personal growth (IES Abroad, 2002). And as one institutional representative put it, “Most students have a wonderful experience, but even if you don’t have a wonderful time, you are going to grow.”



ACADEMIC

Study abroad has been shown to have a direct link to student success. Yeh (2010) found that the learning outcomes of first-generation students included building their knowledge and learning in the classroom, helping them develop academic skills, and helping them discover non-traditional learning opportunities (i.e., service-learning). According to the CASSIE research study, 93.6 percent of first-generation students who studied abroad earned their undergraduate degree within six years, compared to only 58.4 percent of first-generation students who did not study abroad (Bell et al., 2020). Additional academic benefits found by the study include first-generation students who studied abroad completing



93.6% of first-generation students who studied abroad earned their undergraduate degree within six years in comparison to only 58.4% of first-generation students who did not study abroad.

their degree approximately five weeks faster than their first-generation peers who did not study abroad and with a GPA that is on average 0.10 higher.



PROFESSIONAL

Interview participants emphasized the professional advantages of a study abroad experience for first-generation students. Including valuable practical experience to develop professional skills, resume credentials, and career preparation. Some institutions and organizations felt that study abroad made students more competitive applicants for future career opportunities or graduate school. This perception aligns with research by Rausch (2017), which reported that participants' decision to study abroad was influenced by the potential economic benefits, such as making them more competitive applicants for graduate school and future careers. Additionally, the global knowledge and experiences the student develops through a study abroad program may lead to more or different career opportunities, some of which may be less familiar to their families.

Students participating in the Department of State's Gilman International Scholarship Program receive a non-competitive eligibility status for government employment.



Study abroad participants reported positive skill gains from studying abroad in 14 out of 15 skills desired for employment in today's workforce. (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017)

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR ENHANCING PATHWAYS FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS TO ACCESS STUDY ABROAD

Enhancing pathways for first-generation students to access study abroad entails reviewing all aspects of study abroad programming, from outreach to re-entry. Although broader access barriers were discussed previously, this section also focuses on practical barriers to studying abroad. Education abroad practitioners should assess key touchpoints with students, including students' initial exposure to study abroad on campus, marketing material content and messaging, student participation in outreach events, and more. This section will highlight examples from four U.S. higher education institutions that have successfully increased access to study abroad for first-generation students on their campus. It will provide further insights from three study abroad scholarship providers whose funding is dedicated, in part, to first-generation students.

PLANTING THE SEED EARLY

Many higher education institutions are successfully planting the seed for study abroad from the moment they engage with prospective students by highlighting study abroad as a part of the college experience. These institutions also follow up with study abroad information during first-year student orientations. Early information provided to students and parents allows first-generation students to plan for the experience within their academic coursework and financially. Engel (2017) recommends building a K-12 pipeline to higher education that leverages the global curriculum and offers early exposure to international experiences.

A Promise Scholarship

To build a pipeline of study abroad students, some institutions offer a promise scholarship. Whether offered to a high school student or an entering freshman, the promise scholarship offers students study abroad funding in exchange for their participation in workshops and information sessions to prepare for a study abroad experience.

LEVERAGING CAMPUS INTERNATIONALIZATION PLANS

Three institutions described how strategic parts of the campus internationalization plan support study abroad for first-generation students. This goal also demonstrates a commitment to diversifying the student body who study abroad. An explicit focus on first-generation students among the study abroad priorities and demonstrating the benefits of study abroad for first-generation student success can garner greater attention from departments across the institution. They further described how their campuses intentionally add courses with internationalization components to them, which might include studying abroad or, more specifically, a customized study abroad program designed with the first-generation student in mind. Institutional requirements for language study can also contribute to building interest from students ready to practice their language skills. And while the link may be less obvious to first-generation students at the outset, one institution described introducing domestic students to international students once they arrive on campus as a critical part of their study abroad outreach strategy. Creating an international atmosphere on campus and facilitating interactions with students from other countries helps to spark an interest in studying abroad and creates an impression for students that it is possible. Finally, including a study abroad scholarship for first-generation students demonstrates the value of including study abroad in a student's academic plan. One organization noted that even a small scholarship could make a big difference for students. For example, students may be able to apply financial aid, and other funding towards study abroad expenses that match what they are currently paying for schooling but need additional funding for those extra expenses like airfare or, for those living at home, housing.

IS THIS FOR ME?

Interview participants shared that often first-generation students don't realize that study abroad is an option for them. This is supported by data from the U.S. Department of State's Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program that revealed two-thirds of Gilman Scholars believed that students like them did not typically study abroad. Programs like the Gilman Program and the Fund for Education Abroad focus outreach and recruitment efforts on sharing the stories of first-generation students who studied abroad in their own words. Student stories are shared via blog posts, on social media platforms, as presenters on conference panels, and through alumni ambassador activities at their home institution. These efforts allow students to gain more than just general information about studying abroad because they connect first-generation students who studied abroad with other first-generation students on a level where the students can see themselves in these programs.

The Gilman International Scholarship Program contributes to expanding and diversifying the U.S. study abroad population.

66% of Gilman Scholars believed that students like them did not typically study abroad.

SPOTLIGHT: GOVERNOR STATE UNIVERSITY

Each year Governor State University asks undergraduate students to read a community book. Recently, the book titled *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, the story of an African-American man's journey as he traveled abroad to France, was selected for the common book. Given the focus on study abroad in the book, the Office of International Services hosted a panel discussion among faculty leaders and students, including six students of color who went on six different study abroad programs that year. The students were able to share their experiences and discuss with students who were interested in studying abroad what it was like to be black and abroad.

The Office of International Services leveraged this opportunity to support students who were interested in studying abroad by offering eligible students the opportunity to have their passport application fees covered alongside other travel-related prizes.

This community event facilitated a space for rich, open discussion that dispelled the stereotypes and lessened students' fears of how they will be perceived in another country. It ultimately encouraged students to realize that they too could study abroad.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Interview participants describe the application as the first practical barrier students face once they have decided to study abroad. For many first-generation students, navigating the admissions process and getting into college requires a great deal of energy and effort. Their parents may view having entered college as an achievement that should remain the key focus. In addition, the thought of another application process can be intimidating for first-generation students, especially when it may result in speaking with various campus representatives to arrange additional details such as course credits, graduation plans, and finances or navigating new systems and processes like a passport application.

DEMYSTIFYING THE PROCESS

Study abroad advisors, faculty members, and institutional staff can best support first-generation students by demystifying the application process. Spelled out clearly, this means explaining every step in the process in detail. While some interview participants noted that the various identities of a first-generation student might sometimes make it feel confusing to know what aspects of the process to highlight in detail, others shared that by responding to the needs of first-generation students, they ultimately improved their service to all students by assuming that there is always a student who would benefit from learning more about the next step in detail and creating a space for questions.

Interview participants highlighted several areas where faculty or study abroad advisors could better support students by providing:

- ❖ One-on-one sessions with students to review application questions and discuss finances
- ❖ A checklist of individuals and departments the students should meet with before committing to a study abroad program, including academic advisors and the financial aid office or registrar, to discuss what credits are transferable and how credits are acknowledged by their institution
- ❖ A guide for students with language to support conversations with campus administrators
- ❖ Explanations for what a passport is and why you need it
- ❖ One-on-one sessions with students to fill out and review a passport application or to buy an airline ticket
- ❖ Funding for specific study abroad fees such as a passport, visa, and airfare
- ❖ Encouragement to fill out scholarship applications to fund their study abroad experience

What is a passport?

“I was a little shocked to find out that students did not know what a passport was. But interestingly, one student who was eligible for the passport and initially didn’t follow through to get it, has now signed up for a study abroad program. She went out and got her passport eventually.”

- U.S. Higher Education Institution Representative

DEMYSTIFYING THE PROGRAMS

Interview participants described the need to focus on marketing and advertising study abroad programs for first-generation students. This is essential in helping first-generation students see themselves as someone who could or should study abroad.

When institutions recognize the different types of study abroad and global education (Ex. Internships, service learning, volunteer) available to students, they can help first-generation students to make informed choices about the best option for them, including whether that opportunity is right in this moment or their future, post-graduation. Some ways that institutions can support students in selecting a study abroad program:

- ❖ Length of program: Program length affects the overall program cost. However, it does not affect the quality or potential impact on the student. Advisors can help first-generation students and their parents understand the academic value of a short-term program (typically less than two weeks) and how it differs from a vacation. In particular, for faculty-led short-term programs that delve into a niche academic field or experience, it may be valuable to point out the relevance to their future career and professional goals.
- ❖ Provider/Experience: Advisors familiar with various program providers and experiences can guide first-generation students to select program providers that offer essential support, including scholarship funding, work opportunities, or specialized experiences. In addition, advisors can ensure that first-generation students select a program provider that monitors and supports them throughout the experience via regular check-ins or other activities.
- ❖ Program participants: Study abroad advisors and faculty can guide first-generation students to select a program that is prepared to support who they are as a person. While programs designed specifically for first-generation students build-in a peer safety net, advisors can help first-generation students navigate other options. Advisors can help to identify programs that attract students with similar academic and professional goals, taking into account the multiple layers of a first-generation student identity that may affect their study abroad experience.
- ❖ Navigating the experience: Even if a program provider offers participant monitoring support, advisors can check in with students throughout their participation in study abroad to help them navigate the experience. This can be particularly helpful for a first-generation student when other students in the program have participated in study abroad or have more extensive travel experience. Advisors are in a position to reach out to program providers and can provide ‘behind the scenes’ support while also working directly with the students.
- ❖ Helpful reminders: Advisors can remind students to give themselves time, patience, and kindness as they figure out something new. They can provide guidance on how to reach out to people, being open and honest about the challenges they are encountering and teach first-generation students how to ask for support on the tasks at hand (ex., Ask someone how to book a flight.).

KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PROCESS

INVOLVING FACULTY

All of our interview participants noted the impact a single faculty member can have as a champion of study abroad. Faculty members are among the first individuals students encounter and build a trusting relationship with on campus. As champions of study abroad, faculty members can encourage first-generation students to plan for and participate in study abroad programs. They can make students aware of grant and scholarship opportunities to support the experience further. Findings from Goldstein and Lopez (2021) and Rausch (2017) also suggest that academic advisors may play an influential role in diversifying who participates in study abroad programs and how the information provided about programs explicitly addresses the concerns of these students.

Faculty are also in a position to design and lead study abroad programs with small cohorts of students. IIE's Spring 2022 Snapshot survey stated that 90 percent of reporting institutions plan to offer faculty-led study abroad programs in the 2022/23 academic year (Martel & Baer, 2022). As such, they are uniquely positioned to support first-generation students navigate the study abroad planning process and the overall experience.

Finally, faculty members are connected to other faculty, administrators, and leadership at their institution and can advocate for funding, scholarships, and programming that support first-generation and other underserved students.

90% of institutions reporting to IIE's Spring 2022 Snapshot Survey plan to offer faculty-led study abroad programs in the 2022/23 academic year.

PARTNERSHIPS

For one organization, partnering with institutions where an increasing number of first-generation students are applying for a study abroad program is key. They can ensure that scholarship funding reaches those in need and provide additional resources to support campus advisors who are advising first-generation students. This step is critical as some institutions may not have an official study abroad advisor or office, so sharing resources can help them provide the student with necessary information.

Organizations also noted the value of offering information sessions for institutional representatives, not just their students. By offering support to the institutions themselves, organizations can get valuable information about funding opportunities and application tips and tricks into the hands of students, and better prepare them for their study abroad experience. Organizations are also often willing to put together panel presentations at key conferences or post information on their websites and social media platforms to share information that features the voices of first-generation students, demonstrating that study abroad is accessible and inclusive for students who might be the first person they know pursuing this type of experience.

Access Partnerships

One organization highlighted the value of selecting partners that are also dedicated to supporting first-generation students and have resources that can incentivize student participation. For example, an access partner may include a program provider that offers matching funds for students with a Pell grant or a program discount for students who identify on the application as being a first-generation student. This support can help students complete their applications, but also give them the necessary financial assistance to participate in the experience.

INVOLVING PARENTS

One organization highlighted the necessity for first-generation students to convey the importance of a study abroad experience to family members. To support students with this goal, they post resources about how to talk to family members about the value of a study abroad experience and how it will support their academic and professional goals. The resources include details about greater student success following a study abroad experience and information about expanded career opportunities that leverage the global knowledge and skills developed through participating in study abroad.

CONCLUSION

To increase access to study abroad, higher education institutions and organizations dedicated to promoting study abroad can focus attention on the needs of first-generation students. This is an effective strategy for reaching underserved students who may be at a greater disadvantage due to the need to support their multiple overlapping identities. In many instances, the support students need most is the trust of an advisor with the knowledge and understanding to walk them through the details of the task at hand, step by step. Although funding is the number one practical barrier to first-generation student participation in study abroad, there are opportunities for institutions to leverage internal and external scholarships and help students to navigate financial planning to go abroad. As this group within the post-secondary student population continues to grow, higher education institutions, program providers, and all involved in study abroad should take note of how best to engage first-generation students in study abroad as an essential part of their overall student success and internationalization planning.

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