How to Complete a Successful Study Abroad Application – Summary of the Session

The Beloit College study abroad application process is intended to help applicants develop an imagination for their study abroad experience. It should help applicants better understand what they want from study abroad, what they will need to do to achieve their goals, and how study abroad will integrate into their on-going studies and other activities.

Two Step Application Process:
1) Study Abroad Plan submitted to Beloit’s OIE: shows purpose and preparation, and promises to enhance your Beloit College education by allowing you to learn in ways you could not if you remained on campus.
2) Application to Your Program, submitted to the program: Meeting the requirements of entry and possibly competing for limited spots.

Possible Outcomes
- Rewrite: You have not demonstrated a purpose, a plan and preparation
- Conditional Approval. You will be asked to submit additional work, such as a bibliography
- Approval. Okay as is.
- Change of program. Your purpose is solid, but either the program does not fit your purpose, or financial considerations may require a different program.

Your task is to make a persuasive case to faculty who do not know you, about your program choice, program timing (which semester off-campus), how study abroad will enhance your Beloit education, and your preparation for the experience.

Learning Goals – think about your goals
Through Immersion
- gain new perspectives on your field(s) of study,
- develop intercultural competencies and communication skills,
- learn to engage with situations and questions that challenge your own assumptions and values,
- develop the ability to articulate your cultural experience, and
- learn about and from the environments in which you live and study.

Application
- Personal information
- Short essays
- Recommendations
- Course List
- Rationale for choice of semester off-campus
- Interview – 10-15 minutes focusing on how this will benefit you and your education

Essay Topics
1. Your selected program and how it meets your goals
2. How study abroad will enhance your education
3. The educational model of your program
4. Experiential, intercultural and host-country knowledge
5. Challenges foreseen

Essay Instructions
- Use the application question prompts to do research BEFORE attempting to write the essays.
- Once you have completed your research and spoken with advisors, use the question prompts to write concise, persuasive essays about your proposed study abroad. Be specific, adding details and examples.
The essays should reflect your understanding of Beloit College’s Study Abroad Learning Goals and how you will use them to shape your study abroad.

- Upload your essays into the on-line application.

1. Program and Goals. State three to five things you hope you will have learned or be able to do by the end of your study abroad semester/year. Then describe the program or university you hope to attend. How will the program/university and its location help you achieve your goals? What challenges might you encounter in terms of differences in educational philosophy and delivery? If you are applying to study off-campus through a provider program, you must identify an alternative option involving direct enrollment in a university either as an exchange student or visiting student.

Things to do before writing:

- Reflect on your goals for study abroad
- Discuss and refine your goals with an OIE advisor and with your academic advisor
- Choose a program that best fits your study abroad goals, and an alternative as a back-up*
- Thoroughly research your program, host institution, host city and country to develop both greater understanding and curiosity about opportunities available to you.
- Read student evaluations about your program

Note: your alternative program should be selected from Beloit or ISEP programs, or from direct enrollment options. To find options, see www.beloit.edu/oie/off-campus/find_program

Persuasive excerpt:
“My objective is, through cultural and classroom experience, to study and better understand the main conflicts that are taking place in the Middle East and how these affect the possibilities for democratic reform and the rise (or fall) of political Islam and Islamic extremism. These have become the focal point of my studies at Beloit.”

Try again?
“I have always wanted to go the UK, because our family comes from there, and the literature has always fascinated me. Though I have studied French for three years, I don’t think I have the ability to study in France, but I may be able to visit France on the breaks. There are no courses that I can take for my biology major at the University but I plan to pursue my interests in ceramics. I have been in ceramics club for the past two years. There are also some classes in creative writing there, and I always have wanted to get into that.”

2. Connection to Studies. How will the study abroad you propose build on your education to date as well as connect to your education when you return to campus? Rather than simply list courses and other educational experiences, focus on their lessons for you.

Things to do before writing:

- Conceive of study abroad as interwoven with your studies, such as a practical experience to apply theory, as a spring board, a field study, or a way of broadening your understanding of your discipline, and select your program to fit that concept.
- Consider all the courses, internships, projects, etc. that weave into your study abroad experience and what value you derived from them that will be useful in your studies abroad.
- Generate options for how you will bring your experiences abroad to bear on your courses, presentations, research and/or career opportunities after study abroad.

Persuasive excerpt
“At Beloit, I study International Relations and Political Science, and have concentrated on US perspectives on the Muslim world. I have had one internship with an non-profit and one with a my home country’s embassy. My
courses in Brussels will provide a European perspective on the Muslim world and I now will be able to do an internship in an international organization.”

Try again?
“I believe that after studying abroad in Italy, I will come back to Beloit as a more independent and responsible person, with an “upgraded” view of the world. I will not “master” the Italian language, but I will achieve a better understanding on a variety of subjects.”

3. Preparation for Learning Abroad. Study abroad requires background knowledge about a country. It also requires the ability to learn in unstructured settings (experientially) and in unfamiliar environments (interculturally). Specify A) what you have already done to prepare, B) identify what else you will do, and C) explain how the knowledge and abilities have (or will have) prepared you.

Things to do before writing:
• Read student evaluations, specifically the section about preparation.
• Research your host country, city, institution as much as possible before applying, including registering for courses focused on your host country.
• Create a preparation plan for yourself that will familiarize you with history, politics, social and cultural contexts of your host country.
• Take inventory of all experiential learning you have done or will do before you go and what skills you gained from it.
• Recall experiences from your past in dealing with intercultural encounters and lessons you learned that could be applied to your study abroad.

Persuasive excerpt:
“To keep up with current issues in Ecuador, I read the online Ecuadorian news regularly. I have spoken to students from Quito to get their perspectives and will be able to put the Ecuadorian literature I will read into the context of Spanish and Latin American literature I have studied at Beloit... In Nicaragua, I learned what it meant to be uncomfortable and an outsider. But I also learned to extend myself so that I could interact with local people despite language, class and cultural barriers. I hope to do the same in Ecuador... We learned participant observation skills to go to Nicaragua and used field notes. We then used the notes for the research and reflective papers we wrote. This repertoire of field research techniques will be useful in Ecuador, too.”

Try again?
“I have always wanted to go to Australia or at least some part of that world. It has been my dream. The SIT Multicultural Society program in Australia will get me there. I have had plenty of preparation for studying abroad all over the world and in particular, my area of interest. To prepare, I have researched my program on the SIT website.”

4. Non-Academic Challenges. As a study abroad student, you will be a temporary sojourner in your host site(s). Based on your research and conversations with past study abroad students, faculty, and others, discuss how your temporary status and your social identity (national, socio-economic, educational, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender, religious, political, and so on) might influence your study abroad experience. Be specific in reference to the country you are going to. What other non-academic challenges might you confront and how will you address them?

Things to do before writing:
• Read student evaluations and talk to students who have been on your program, or seek information on the program website.
• Study social statistics in your host country and compare them to the US on GapMinder (http://www.gapminder.org/)

**Persuasive excerpt**

“Japanese social structure is comprised of a complex and rigid network of “in-groups” and out-groups.” This often leaves exchange students studying in Japan feeling cut-off and isolated. I know I will be an outsider in the eyes of the native Japanese people I meet, and I shouldn’t be judgmental about this. Also, while being with international students will decrease my sense of isolation, I will have to be careful to balance my contact with international students with exposure to Japanese people.”

**Try again?**

“Lingnan University has had an exchange program with Beloit College for some time now. I think that the relationship between the schools will help decrease some of the challenges of studying abroad because certain students, professors, and administrators will have already had contact with Beloit students. From what I have heard Americans are generally not disliked in Hong Kong, and there is a close economic relationship between China and America. I am sure that I will have some interesting conversations.”

**Writing Tips**

- Start early
- Write a short essay for each question
- Remember your audience: six faculty members and the OIE director
- Be specific, give examples of “how” and “why”
- Proofread and edit your essays
- Have someone else read your essays

Remember that the faculty reading the applications do not know who you are —you need to tell them, show them you know what you are getting into, and that you are adequately prepared.

**Resources**

- Librarians, faculty and students
- Information links on Beloit study abroad program webpages
- Writing center tutors
- Individual advising sessions in OIE
- Student evaluations

**What have you already done? Who have you talked to? Why is it important to have more than one source of information?**

**Next Steps**

- Do research – on your country, classes, what more you can do to be prepared
- Meet with your advisor and with the campus advisor (if it is a Beloit or ACM program)
- Make an appointment in OIE to discuss your plans with an advisor – x 2269 or oie@beloit.edu
- Read student evaluations of study abroad programs
- Talk with Financial Aid about your aid package
- Speak with your recommenders about completing a recommendation for you

**How to submit an application**

- Use the StudioAbroad Program Finder to find your program and start an application.
- Prepare your essays. When complete, upload them into your application.
• Send out the online recommendation forms. Make sure to get your advisor’s approval, if he or she is not one of your recommendors.
• Submit your unofficial transcript in person to the Office of International Education
  o on or before November 1 or
  o on or before February 1
• Make an appointment for an interview

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