CHOOSING THE PROGRAM THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU

The possibilities for off-campus study can be overwhelming. Before researching programs you will want to have made some preliminary decisions as to the type of experience you want to have. Start by realistically assessing your academic and personal preparation and your objectives. As you research among the many program possibilities, ask yourself the following questions and use the Choosing the Program That is Right For You to help you think through what kind of off-campus study experience would be the right “fit” for you.

GOALS & CONSIDERATIONS
- What do I hope to achieve by studying abroad?
- What are my personal goals for my time abroad? Primarily academic? Do I want to volunteer, do an internship or community service while abroad?
- How will my term abroad complement my course of studies here on campus?
- Do I want to take my language skills to the next level? Is my goal to become fluent in another language?
- How do I envision myself spending my days? Who would I most like to meet? In some programs, you may get to know a number of community members, while others may offer more opportunities to meet college students.
- How important is it for me to be involved with local culture and people?
- How will study abroad impact me?
- What will be most challenging for me about studying abroad?

LOCATION
- Where do I want to go? Why?
- Do I want to study in a less-developed or more-developed country?
- Do I want to be in a big city or a small town/rural area?

ACADEMICS
- What do I want or need to study to meet academic objectives?
- Are there specific academic requirements that I need to fulfill during study abroad?
- Does my major require me to enroll in a particular type of program?
- Am I fluent enough in a foreign language to take classes, write papers, and take notes, or will I need to take some or all of your coursework in English?
- Am I interested in taking courses on the language and culture of the host country?
- What kind of language-learner am I?
- Do I want to focus on my current major interests from a different perspective?
- Would I like to explore a new subject for a semester?
- Do I have research interests I’d like to explore in a foreign setting?

PROGRAM STRUCTURE
- Do I want to be in a university setting? Directly enrolled into a foreign university?
- Do I want to be on a field-based or experiential program focused on a particular theme?
- Do I feel more comfortable with the services of a resident director or am I confident I can handle enrollment, sightseeing and travel on your own?
- Is class and university size important to me?

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS
- To what extent do I wish to integrate myself into the host culture?
- Do I want to live in a university dormitory? An apartment?
- Do I want to live with other Americans or with local students?
- Do I want to live with a local family in a homestay? A combination of the above?

TIMING & DURATION
- How long do I want to study abroad (academic year, semester, summer)?
- When do I want to go? Fall? Spring? Full year?
• Are there courses here that I need to take on campus in order to graduate?

COST
• Is cost a factor?
• How much money can I spend on the study abroad experience? Consider not only tuition and fees, but also housing and food, personal expenses, and international travel.
• Are there scholarships that I might be eligible for?

ELIGIBILITY
• Does my GPA qualify me for Colby approval (2.7) or for the program (Minimum GPA requirements vary from 2.5 - 3.0 depending on the program)?
• Do I have the language skills required for the program?
• Do I have time to apply before the application deadline?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS IN CHOOSING YOUR OCS PROGRAM

Language instruction: Do not assume that if you do not have great language competency or background you can only study in an English speaking country. There are some programs in Europe or Asia that accept students with no previous knowledge of the host-country language, although you will be required to take an introductory course in the language during the semester.
Example: CHP in Prague, DIS in Copenhagen, the Swedish Program in Stockholm.

Teaching and learning: There is much variation among programs in teaching methods, types of assignments, amount of supervision and direction from instructors, and forms of assessment. All students should pay close attention to this, and bear in mind that the method of assessment of many university courses remains heavily weighted towards final examinations, and most courses offer less direct contact with the instructor than you are used to a Colby.

Housing: While most universities abroad don’t have an American-style campus life or dormitories, some do. Some programs give you a choice of housing options or a mix of several over the course of the semester, others have just one option. The most common options are homestays (living with a local family), dormitories (living with local or other international students), and apartments shared with other program participants, local students, or both. In many field-based programs, housing is usually some combination of small local hostels, field station dormitory, homestays, and/or camping during the semester.

Program Style: Some students want a great deal of independence and are willing to do a lot of legwork on things like finding their own housing, figuring out how to register for courses, and learning about the host culture, while others prefer to be part of a program that will take care of these details for them. You may want to stay away from Americans as much as possible, or you may decide it would be more comfortable to be around at least some people with similar backgrounds, going through the acculturation process together. There’s no one right answer, so think about finding a good balance based on your knowledge of yourself.

Service Learning/Volunteering: Some programs have a service-learning component or are able to help you get involved in volunteer work.

Location: You may choose a program by the country or city in which it is based. This is especially common for those who want to study a particular society (current or historic), environmental phenomenon, language, or culture. You may want to consider whether you will be able to travel in the region, and whether the political climate is conducive to your spending a semester or year there. Also consider if you want to live in a big city, a smaller city, or a more rural area.

Personal Factors: These may include the cost of living in the countries you’re considering, your health situation (asthma, for instance, may preclude some locations), courses available in your major field of study, dates (some programs run only at one time of year, and some have a calendar that conflicts with the US university schedule or summer break), a longstanding desire to live near the sea or to follow in Fitzgerald’s footsteps, and so on.
Cost: Program and university costs vary greatly. Since while studying abroad Colby students pay the cost of the program (not Colby tuition) you should check on each program/university for their fees. In general, fees for direct enrollment in a foreign university are lower than applying through a program provider but these program providers’ program fee usually includes a variety of services including: application, pre-departure, medical insurance, orientation, excursions, assistance with course selection, registration and housing and other on-site support services for students on site. Use the Off-Campus Study Budget Planning Worksheet on the OCS website under Financing Off-Campus Study.

Physical & Mental Health: Studying abroad, like any growth promoting educational experience, by its very nature is intellectually, physical, and emotionally challenging. It can create stress that may trigger or exacerbate mental and physical health issues. Review the advice in Part IV of this handbook in considering if and where to go and be sure to discuss your plans with your counselor, doctor, and study abroad advisor. The OCS office can help you select and program that can provide the local features, resources or support that you require.

NOTE: Whether you are generally healthy, have significant medical needs, or fall somewhere in between, planning ahead will help you have a successful and healthy study abroad experience. The same things that make studying abroad exciting (new foods, customs, climate, people, etc.) can also present challenges. Many students will adjust very readily with little or no difficulty, while others may experience a range of physical and/or emotional challenges. It is important to be aware that the stresses that often accompany studying abroad may exacerbate ongoing physical or mental health conditions, trigger pre-existing ones, or, in some cases, cause new health conditions to emerge.

Please read and complete the Health Self Assessment (below) carefully, even if you currently consider yourself to be generally healthy.

Learning Differences & Disabilities: Not all destinations can provide the level of understanding or support that you may need or have grown accustomed to at home. If you have a learning or physical disability that could affect your participation, we would be pleased to help you identify suitable options. Remember that the environment, facilities, and legal requirements will vary greatly in different countries and programs.

If you currently receive any academic accommodations at Colby and hope to receive the same while off-campus, you should contact Dean Atkins in the Dean of Students office. You may be required to provide documentation to your program or university.

How NOT to choose a program: In all of this please remember to make your academic and personal needs your first priority, so that you do not waste energy on an unsuitable idea. Do not choose a program (or a semester) because that is where or when your friends are applying; find the best program for your own individual needs, and avoid the insularity that would make you spend much of your time away with people you know well.

Remember, finally, that it is perfectly fine to remain here. Deciding to go abroad because your friends are going, to escape from an unsatisfactory campus or home situation, or get away from a personal relationship or other problems are not always good reasons to go. The difficulty with these latter reasons is that study abroad may not be an answer at all and, indeed, could make matters worse. There are other and usually better ways of resolving some of these issues: taking time off altogether from studying, seeking counseling, or directly confronting the problem. In short, study abroad is not for everyone, and should not be entered into lightly, with no forethought as to how it fits in with your personal, academic, or career goals. You may have to make some hard choices; but remember that there are many other study abroad opportunities, including summer, Jan Plan, and graduate study, if a semester or year abroad is not feasible.

INFORMATION FOR SCIENCE MAJORS AND PRE-MED STUDENTS

There are numerous opportunities for science students to study abroad. Students in disciplines such as Biology and Mathematics, which do not have a great degree of vertical structuring in their curricula, have the most opportunities for study abroad. However, even in the more sequentially organized disciplines, such as Chemistry, Geology, Psychology and Physics, foreign study is possible with advanced planning and consultation with advisors within the department. Regardless of your discipline, a valuable program of foreign study requires careful planning and discussion with your advisor well before you participate in the program.
Pre-medical and pre-dental students can also consider international study. While it is generally advisable not to take required pre-medical or pre-dental courses at a foreign university, it may be possible to do so after a thorough examination of the course in question, and a careful comparison of its content with that at a US university. There are many health related study abroad programs which offer an excellent opportunity to explore the health field and gain some valuable hands-on experience (review the program opportunities list by searching on “health” in the programs filter).

In some cases it may be possible for a science major to study abroad for a semester without studying science. This requires careful planning in consultation with your major advisor so that you do not have an unusually heavy course load upon your return.

With good planning, many pre-med and natural science majors find a way to study abroad for at least a semester or more. It requires some carefully planning, consulting with the pre-health advisor in the Career center and it depends on your timeframe for pursuing your medical degree.

Consult with your Pre-Health Advisor Cate Talbot Ashton in the Colby Career Center or Ed Yeterian in the Psychology Department.

**PLANNING FOR SENIOR YEAR**

You should think about your plans for senior year as you begin planning when and for how long to go and where to study. Before leaving campus, you should also think about ways in which study abroad may enhance and/or interfere with some of your senior year or post-graduate plans. In fact, being able to integrate what you learned abroad into what you are doing on campus upon return can help mitigate the difficulties of reentry.

- **Independent study or honors project:** While studying away, many students discover or start new avenues of research that lead to an independent study or honors project in the senior year; or they can simply apply their new skills and share their experience in regular Colby coursework. Speak with your advisor about this possibility before you leave or contact them from abroad.

- **Graduate school applications:** Off-campus study experience may also strengthen applications for graduate schools and scholarships. You are strongly recommended to investigate all these possibilities, but as with independent studies, you should discuss them with your advisors and Career Center contacts before departure; without previous planning you will find it very hard to make all the necessary plans and meet deadlines at the beginning of your senior year. Students interested in the health professions should consult Cate Ashton in the Career Center.

- **Internships:** It is not unusual for students who study abroad to use contacts and resources in their host country to obtain internships for the following summer (or Jan Plan), or to search from abroad for an internship in the U.S. Or you may consider doing an internship program as part of your study abroad program during the semester.