

Education Abroad and Exchange Programs

VCU Office of International Education

Procedures and Guidelines

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PURPOSE

VCU Education Abroad exists to facilitate study abroad for VCU students and study at VCU for international exchange students who want to study in the U.S. This purpose of this document is to articulate the processes required to initiate education abroad and exchange programs.

Virginia Commonwealth University is committed to promoting study abroad for all VCU students and encourages all students, from every academic discipline, to receive a part of their university education in an international environment. This commitment is underlined in Theme II, Initiative 8 of the VCU 2020 Strategic Plan: Develop strong and continuing semester-long and year-long international exchange programs for undergraduate students, with a goal of 2,000 VCU students studying abroad per year, matched by a similar number of students from our sister institutions studying on our campuses.

Students today live in an international community. Study abroad helps them appreciate multicultural richness, understand the value of knowing a language other than English, and compete professionally in a global market.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS DOCUMENT

All faculty interested in organizing a short-term study abroad program should read this document and work closely with the VCU Office of Education Abroad in organizing their program. In addition, VCU students who want to study at one of VCU's International Partnership Universities or at another university outside of the United States should read this document for guidance on how to arrange their study abroad so that they receive academic credit toward their degree program at VCU.

CONTACTS

The VCU Office of International Education, with specific guidance from the VCU Office of Education Abroad, will interpret these procedures and guidelines and will revise or eliminate any or all parts as necessary to meet the changing needs of Virginia Commonwealth University and of all faculty and students interested in participating in a study program outside the United States. The procedures and guidelines will also be revised as necessary to protect the interests of international students who want to study at VCU as special non-degree-seeking students.

PROCEDURES

I. Organizing a VCU-Approved Faculty-Led Short Term Study Abroad Program

A. Approval for the Short Term Study Abroad Program

Faculty at VCU who are interested in organizing a short term study abroad program will first make a site visit to the location of interest. The site visit will allow the faculty member to inspect classroom facilities (where applicable), housing arrangements for students, places for program participants to eat, and investigate possible excursions and cultural events. The VCU Office of International Education does not provide funding for the site visit, except for program proposals which have been approved and accepted through VCU's International Partnership Universities.

In choosing a site for a short term study abroad program, the faculty leader is advised to pay close attention to travel warnings and public announcements from the U.S. Department of State (www.state.gov) which are in effect for the proposed country of travel. The Program Director will also need to be knowledgeable about and take into account other issues like potential exposure to dangerous diseases, whether students will need special immunizations, what visas may be required for entry into the country, and the past and recent political history of the country.

Once the faculty member has decided to organize a short-term study abroad program, he/she will submit the "VCU Education Abroad Faculty-Led Program Proposal" (see RELATED DOCUMENTS). The second part of this proposal document will be a letter of recommendation from the faculty member's chair or dean.

All tenured, tenure-track or adjunct members of the VCU faculty will be eligible for consideration for a faculty-led short term study abroad assignment. The "VCU Education Abroad Faculty-Led Program Proposal" must be submitted to the VCU Office of Education Abroad by September 15 of the year preceding the winter or summer program.

The Education Abroad Committee, organized by the VCU Office of Education Abroad and comprised of current Faculty Education Abroad Program Directors, will review the proposed study abroad program, and the faculty member will be notified of the Committee's decision by the VCU Office of Education Abroad by October 1.

The study abroad Program Director and the Director of the VCU Office of Education Abroad will co-sign a "Contract of Agreement for Summer

Study and Short Term Abroad Programs” (see RELATED DOCUMENTS) which will detail responsibilities of both parties.

B. Responsibilities of the Program Director:

1. Develop guidelines for the program, including:
 - a. How many students may participate
 - b. Who is eligible to participate
 - c. What expenses are included in the program fee
 - d. Where students will be housed and where they will eat
 - e. Course number(s) and course content
 - f. Whether the program will be open to undergraduate and/or graduate students
 - g. Whether six academic credits will be available for the program so that students can apply for financial aid
2. Arrange a meeting with the Fiscal Manager of the Office of International Education to develop a program budget for submission by the assigned fall date.
3. Submit complete program details by the assigned date each fall.
4. Complete the necessary forms for course initiation through the faculty member’s department before the program is advertised.
5. Attend all Program Director meetings organized by the VCU Office of Education Abroad.
6. Participate actively in the promotion of the study abroad program, with the assistance of the VCU Office of Education Abroad.
7. Return to the VCU Office of Education Abroad all student applications marked “Accepted” or “Denied” within a week of receiving them for review. Students will submit an application form like the one for the 2007 Graz, Austria program (see RELATED DOCUMENTS).
8. Post the itinerary and travel arrangements on the Blackboard site arranged for the program by the VCU Office of Education Abroad.
9. Organize at least one pre-departure orientation for all participants in the program. (The Program Director will be responsible for all communication with program participants regarding itinerary, travel and accommodations, academic requirements, and meeting schedules.)
10. Provide pictures of the study abroad site to be used in program promotional materials.
11. Meet with the Fiscal Manager of the Office of International Education to complete the International Travel Authorization three months prior to departure. (The Program Director will be responsible for following all Virginia and United States regulations related to program expenses and reimbursable expenses. Program Directors having questions about these regulations will be responsible for discussing questions with the Fiscal Manager of the VCU Office of International Education.)
12. Complete the health and safety workshop organized by the VCU Office of Education Abroad.

13. Obtain a corporate travel card through the faculty member's home department.
14. Make himself/herself available to program participants during the entire duration of the program.
15. Remit receipts for program expenses to the Fiscal Manager in the VCU Office of International Education within one week of the end of the program.
16. Submit grade reports in a timely manner (following University guidelines) upon return from the program.
17. Provide contact information for all phases of the summer abroad program to the Director of VCU Education Abroad.
18. Notify the Director of VCU Education Abroad concerning any emergencies or unusual events which take place during the program.

C. Responsibilities of the VCU Office of Education Abroad:

1. Provide Program Directors with a minimum of two seminars to assist with the development process from program idea to day of departure.
2. Produce marketing and promotional materials for the program.
3. Create VCU study abroad programs website.
4. Create application forms.
5. Organize and manage the study abroad registration process.
6. Process all paper work for student registration and register students for the program courses.
7. Provide students with financial aid information.
8. Administer Education Abroad scholarship program.
9. Assist Program Directors with management of all financial transactions, including vendor payments and travel reimbursements.
10. Provide all study abroad students with pre-departure information and an International Student Identification Card, which carries limited health insurance.
11. Send all enrolled students an end-of-program evaluation form to be returned to the VCU Office of Education Abroad.

D. VCU Course Initiation for Short-term Study Abroad programs

The Program Director will be responsible for obtaining approval for the short-term study abroad program course and a course number from his/her Department Curriculum Committee.

The "Virginia Commonwealth University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee Curriculum Approval Request Form" (see RELATED DOCUMENTS) will be filled out and signed by the Chair of the Department Curriculum Committee and the Dean of the College or School.

The proposed course will be reviewed and approved by the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UUCC). Forms are available on the Curriculum Committee website.

<http://www.provost.vcu.edu/committees/uucc/forms.html>

The Program Director will submit a copy of the “University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee Curriculum Approval Request Form” to the VCU Office of Education Abroad when the request is submitted to the UUCC.

The course initiation will only be done once, as the course may carry over from year to year. However, the Program Director will be responsible for updating the course schedule each year.

Proposals for new graduate courses to be taught during study abroad programs must follow guidelines established by the Graduate Program and Courses Committee which is one of the four standing committees of the VCU Graduate Council. Guidelines can be found at

http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/pdfs/Submission_instructions.pdf

Program Directors are requested to set enrollment in the class at 0 so that students cannot register independently. Students must register for courses in short-term study abroad programs through the VCU Office of Education Abroad.

E. Budget Considerations

In establishing the budget (anticipated total expenses) for the short-term study abroad program, the Program Director will adhere to the following guidelines:

- A new program will base the budget on having no more than eight students.
- A repeat program with fewer than 12 students the previous year will be based on the number of students from the previous year.
- A repeat program with 12 to 15 students the previous year will base its budget on a maximum number of 12.
- A program with more than 16 students the previous year will base its current-year budget on 16 students.

Program Director air travel tickets will be purchased through a State contract agency if the tickets are to be paid through an approved *Request for Travel Authorization*. If the tickets are purchased “off-contract,” the Program Director will be reimbursed after the program is completed.

Since the Program Director's air travel ticket is paid by the students in the program, it is recommended by the Office of International Education that a Program Director who chooses to upgrade to Business Class be responsible for paying any cost above the cost of the coach ticket.

All international *Request for Travel Authorizations* and *Travel Expense Reimbursement Vouchers* related to study abroad programs will be prepared by the Fiscal Manager of the VCU Office of International Education and will be approved by the Executive Director of VCU International Education (or designee).

Payments directly to vendors in the summer abroad program country will be processed according to the vendors' requirements by the Fiscal Manager of the VCU Office of International Education. The Program Director will provide the VCU International Education Fiscal Manager with invoices, addresses and bank information for all vendors. A total payment to a single vendor cannot exceed \$50,000.

No reimbursement will be made for alcoholic beverages.

The VCU Office of Risk Management advises that Program Directors purchase local auto-vehicle rental insurance through an in-country agency so that the insurance will be compatible with local laws and customs. If needed VCU vehicle insurance coverage will exceed the limit provided by the rental agency in most instances.

All questions concerning program budgets, International Travel Authorizations for study abroad programs, or expense reimbursement will be addressed to the Fiscal Manager of the VCU Office of International Education.

F. Salary for Summer Study Abroad Program Director

Program Directors will be paid a salary for their summer program based on the VCU Summer Studies/Intersession Faculty Compensation Policy (see VCU Administrative Toolkit Policies, Procedures & Guidelines <http://www.toolkit.vcu.edu/SummerSchoolIntersessionCompensationPolicy.pdf>.)

G. Guidelines for Program Directors with Children and Families

Children of the Program Director who are high-school age or older will be permitted to attend the program as long as they pay the program fees and are enrolled in program classes.

Program Director children who are younger than high-school age will be accompanied by an adult (other than the Program Director) at all times.

Family members and children of the Program Director who are not full participants in the program will not be permitted to participate in excursions with the group. However, they will be allowed to follow the group if separate transportation and housing arrangements are made.

H. Blackboard Site for VCU Study Abroad Program

Program Directors will manage a Blackboard Site for their study abroad program which will give the following information:

- Dates (begin date and end date) for housing accommodations.
- Course descriptions and list of required materials.
- Syllabus.
- Packing tips.
- Itinerary for the entire program. If any events are “flexible” or “optional,” they will be marked accordingly.
- A suggested flight for students to take, and a “buy by” date.
- Emergency contact information.

I. Pre-Departure Preparations

All VCU short-term study abroad program participants will be issued an International Student Identification Card which will be prepared by the VCU Office of Education Abroad.

Program Directors will be responsible for explaining clearly to the program participants ALL expected risks involved with the program. Warnings about risky situations or dangerous behavior will be presented in a clear, direct and specific manner. The Program Director will be responsible for informing program participants of any risk or dangerous situation which arises during the program.

The Program Director will send documents detailing itinerary and contact information, as well as a list of all faculty and students, to the nearest US Consulate in the host country before the study abroad program begins.

The Program Director will provide VCU Education Abroad a list of participants and their contact information during the program. This will include home stays, hotels and student apartments and/or dormitories.

The Program Director will provide VCU Education Abroad his/her contact information for all times during the program.

The Program Director will keep a copy of the photo page of each participant's passport on hand, as well as all participants' contact information and next-of-kin contact information, in case of emergency. The Program Director will carry an international cell phone at all times during the program.

J. Emergency Response Plan

Program Directors will be responsible for formulating an emergency response plan in case of an emergency during the program and will communicate this Emergency Response Plan to all program participants. The Program Director will also submit a copy of the Emergency Response Plan to the VCU Office of Education Abroad for review and approval at least four months before the program start date.

The Emergency Response Plan will include, as a minimum, the following:

- Program Director will register all program participants at the nearest U.S. Embassy/Consulate upon arrival in the host country.
- Program Directors will be responsible for informing all program participants of the location and telephone number of the nearest U.S. Embassy/Consular Office and will be sure that the participants know how to find the Embassy/Consulate. The Program Directors are encouraged to provide this information in a form which the participants can keep in their wallets.
- In case of a terrorist attack or natural disaster, or other major life threatening incidents, the Program Director will contact and/or bring the entire group to the nearest U.S. Embassy recommended point of evacuation.
- Program Director will formulate a basic response if a student is arrested, injured, needs medical care, etc.
- Program Directors will keep the VCU Office of Education Abroad informed of any emergency situation. All public statements from VCU involving a study abroad program emergency will be made by the Director of VCU University News Services.
- When an emergency situation exists, the Program Director will keep a written log of actions taken and will update the log as the emergency progresses. A copy of the emergency situation log is to be forwarded regularly to the VCU Office of Education Abroad.

- Program Directors will encourage all program participants to exercise utmost discretion and respect for the identity of any victim of an emergency situation, particularly if the emergency is the result of sexual assault or violent action. Identity should not be divulged to media or any others in all cases.

K. Drugs and Alcohol

Students participating in a VCU study abroad program will be responsible for observing all laws relating to drugs and alcohol in the country in which they are studying.

Under **no** circumstances will the Program Director be permitted to buy alcohol or drugs for any program participants. Program Directors will not be reimbursed by VCU for alcohol purchased during the program.

L. Dismissal of Students from a Program

Program Directors will reserve the right to dismiss any participant from the program at any time if the participant's behavior is disruptive to the program or endangers the safety of the other program participants.

II. International Student Exchange Programs

A. Earning Graduate Credit Abroad

Students seeking graduate credit for coursework completed abroad must obtain permission from the Graduate Dean for approval of course transfer, preferably **BEFORE** beginning such coursework. Final approval for any graduate transfer credit is reviewed and approved by the Graduate School.

B. VCU International Partnership Universities Student Exchanges

Virginia Commonwealth University has established International Partnerships with Universities in other countries. VCU students may participate in semester/year student exchanges and/or specially designed short-term programs with these partnerships institutions.

VCU students interested in applying to an exchange or short-term program with one of the partnerships will contact the VCU Office of Education Abroad for advice and guidance. The VCU Office of Education Abroad will aid students with the application process.

VCU students going abroad on a partnership semester/year exchange program will pay standard VCU tuition and fees (fees may also include room and board,

depending upon the student exchange agreement established with each partnership university). Concerning tuition, room and board, all partnership student exchanges are reciprocal. VCU Education Abroad will therefore explain to VCU students the various costs covered during a particular exchange program with a partnership institution. Students will be responsible for airfare, medical health insurance, passport and visa fees, and all other incidental expenses.

Students will obtain approval from their VCU Academic Advisors for the courses they will take at the partner institution BEFORE they leave for the program. The student will complete the course approval form "Education Abroad Course Approval Form" (see RELATED DOCUMENTS) and submit it to the VCU Office of Education Abroad.

VCU Office of Education Abroad will register the student in a VCU "place holder" class in Banner for each semester the student attends the partnership university. This will allow the student to apply for financial aid and remain an active VCU student while abroad.

Upon returning to VCU, a student's grades and number of credits for courses will be applied to his/her VCU academic program following the evaluation process/agreement set forth between the International Credential Evaluator and Registrar offices at VCU and the International Partnership University.

International partnership students coming to VCU will pay tuition and fees at their home university but will pay housing, food and all other expenses at VCU or as outlined in the specific international partnership student exchange agreement between VCU and their institution.

VCU Education Abroad will be responsible for ensuring that in-coming partnership students have appropriate housing during their stay at VCU.

C. VCU Department or School Specific Student Exchange Programs

After consultation with the VCU Office of International Education, VCU Departments and/or Schools may elect to establish student exchange programs outside the International Partnership Universities. The details explaining the nature of the exchange will be set-forth in a Student Exchange Agreement. All such Agreements, in addition to Chair/Director and Dean's signatures, must also have signatures of the Executive Director of International Education, the Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs, the Vice Provost for International Affairs and the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

VCU Education Abroad will work with the appointed Department/School designee on the design of the advising structure to be put into place both for VCU

students and the in-coming exchange students participating in Department/School specific exchange programs.

D. VCU students participating in the International Student Exchange Programs (ISEP)

Virginia Commonwealth University maintains a membership in the International Student Exchange Programs (ISEP) to allow VCU students who want to study abroad for a semester or academic year to study in one of the international ISEP member universities. www.isep.org

VCU students interested in applying to the ISEP program will contact the VCU Office of Education Abroad for advice and guidance. The VCU Office of Education Abroad will assist students with the ISEP application.

VCU students going abroad on an ISEP program will pay the ISEP fee (based on VCU in-state tuition), including room and board and an ISEP application fee and Office of Education Abroad fee. Students will also be responsible for their own airfare, medical health insurance, passport and visa fees, and all other incidental expenses.

Students will obtain approval from their VCU Academic Advisors for the courses they will take in their international school BEFORE they leave on their program. Students will complete the course approval form “Education Abroad Course Approval Form” (see RELATED DOCUMENTS) and submit it to the VCU Office of Education Abroad.

After the student has accepted ISEP placement, the VCU Office of Education Abroad will register the ISEP student in a VCU “place holder” class in Banner for each semester that the student is away from VCU. This will allow the student to apply for financial aid and to remain an active VCU student.

VCU students going abroad on an ISEP program will be responsible for obtaining their own passports and making their own travel arrangements. Note: Obtaining a passport may require 3 weeks (expedited) to several months (<https://pptform.state.gov/FraudAbuseNotice.aspx?form=DS11>). Housing and food will be included in their program.

When the student returns from the ISEP study program, the VCU International Credentials Evaluator in the Office of International Admissions will evaluate the student’s ISEP program transcript and determine the course grade and number of credits to be applied to the student’s VCU academic program. Final decisions on what courses will be applied to the student’s VCU program will be made by the student’s academic advisor.

III. International students coming to VCU on the ISEP program

International students who want to study at VCU through an ISEP program will apply to ISEP through their home university. ISEP will evaluate that student's academic performance and notify the VCU Office of Education Abroad of the student's interest in being placed at VCU. The VCU Office of International Education will confirm the student's placement after reviewing the application.

These students will come to VCU on J-1 visas, with ISEP as their sponsor.

Like VCU students studying abroad on an ISEP program, the international ISEP students will pay tuition, fees and room and board to their home university. They will not pay tuition, fees, housing or food to VCU. These expenses will be covered by the ISEP fees paid by VCU students going abroad which are kept in a special ISEP account.

The VCU Office of Education Abroad will be responsible for orientation of these students to VCU, including arranging on-campus dormitory housing, shopping trips to purchase initial supplies and information about the campus and safety.

The Office of Education Abroad will also register the ISEP students in VCU classes, after consultation with the departments in which the students want to study.

IV. Non-VCU programs

VCU students may also choose a study-abroad program administered by another U.S. university, a foreign university, or an approved program provider. The VCU Office of Education Abroad will advise students on programs that will meet the students' specific needs.

All students who study abroad in a non-VCU program must submit the "Study Abroad and Exchange Institution Approval Form" (see RELATED DOCUMENTS) due by November 15 for spring programs and by April 15 for summer and fall programs.

Students are advised to get approval from their academic advisors on courses they plan to take in the foreign university. When the students return, their transcripts will be evaluated for grades and course credits to be applied to their VCU program by the VCU Credentials Evaluator in the VCU Office of International Admissions. Final decisions on what courses will be applied to the student's VCU program will be made by the student's academic advisor.

V. Travel Immunizations

For Students

The VCU University Student Health Services offers in-depth pre-travel consultation with a health care provider as well as many of the required vaccinations. Additionally, prescriptions for recommended medications as well as suggestions for safer travel are provided.

Students are requested to call the University Student Health Services (828-8828 on the Monroe Park Campus and 828-9220 on the Medical Campus) to set up a thirty-minute travel appointment at least 6-8 weeks prior to the departure date.

Prior to the appointment date, students should stop by the clinic to complete a Travel Information, History and Care Form. It is important that this information be reviewed before the clinic visit so all pertinent issues can be resolved.

For further information on this service, students may review the website of the University Student Health Services at http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/immunizations/travel_care.php.

For Faculty

In addition to viewing the above weblink on immunizations made available by University Student Health Services, VCU faculty who are traveling abroad should contact either their physician or the VCU Faculty Travel Clinic on the MCV Campus (for more information: Dr. Clarence Childress, Infectious Disease, VCU Internal Medicine, Tel: 804-828-9711)

VI. Faculty/Student International Identification Cards

VCU students must acquire an international student identification card through the VCU Office of Education Abroad before going abroad. It is also advised that VCU faculty acquire the International Teacher Identification Card (ITIC) before traveling abroad as many agencies/museums only accept this card as proof of faculty status at a US institution. The card carries basic travel and insurance benefits, including medical evacuation and repatriation. The VCU Office of Education Abroad has applications and is approved to issue the card to faculty.

VII. Health insurance during Study Abroad Program

For Students

VCU students involved in study abroad programs must have medical health insurance which covers them abroad. All students will receive the International Student Identification Card (ISIC), which carries basic insurance coverage, including medical evacuation and repatriation of remains.

Students are advised to review the ISIC insurance benefits and to obtain additional coverage from another insurance carrier if they prefer to have a higher level of benefits.

Students must carry their health insurance card(s) with them at all times while participating in the study abroad program. A copy of the card(s) should also be kept in a safe place in the student's lodging.

For Faculty (Program Directors)

Program Directors involved in study abroad programs must have medical health insurance which covers them abroad. Program Directors will receive the International Teacher Identification Card (ITIC) which carries basic insurance coverage, including medical evacuation and repatriation of remains.

Program Directors who have medical benefits through VCU should check with their CovaCare provider before leaving the U.S. because health benefits may be different outside the U.S.

If emergency care is needed, the Program Director will go to the nearest hospital but must call 1-800-810-2583 or 1-804-673-1177 (collect) as soon as possible if admitted. CovaCare must be called in advance of any non-emergency inpatient medical care.

Program Directors who are not covered by VCU medical health insurance will provide their own insurance coverage in addition to what is offered through the ITIC.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Education Abroad Course Approval Form
- Contract of Agreement for Summer Study and Short-Term Abroad Programs
- University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC) Curriculum Approval Request Form
- VCU Education Abroad Application for Partnership and Departmental Exchanges/Application for Study Abroad and Exchange/Agreement and Release/Academic Reference
- VCU Education Abroad Program Director's Manual
- VCU Education Abroad Faculty-Led Program Proposal

- VCU Graz, Austria Summer Study Abroad Program
- Study Abroad and Exchange Institutional Approval Form
- Student Health Services
http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/immunizations/travel_clinic.php
- Travel related:
 - Office of International Education Travel Guidelines for VCU Faculty/Staff/Students
 - Request for Travel Authorization form (available on the VCU Administrative Toolkit <http://www.toolkit.vcu.edu/forms.htm#T>)
 - U.S. Department of State travel warnings, travel alerts and country specific information. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis_pa_tw_1168.html