

Virginia Public Higher Education Guidelines for Study Abroad

Virginia Code §23.1-903.1 states:

- A. As used in this section, "study abroad program" means a program sponsored, offered, or approved for credit by an institution of higher education in which program participants travel outside the United States in connection with an educational experience.
- B. The Council shall develop guidelines for study abroad programs.

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) adopts the guidelines below in fulfillment of the duty described by §23.1-903.1, and in accord with its general responsibility to establish policies for public higher education in the Commonwealth, as per §23.1-203 (15).¹

Prologue

Recognizing the substantial benefits of study abroad experiences to students' development of intercultural competency and personal growth, SCHEV encourages Virginia's institutions of higher education to offer a wide variety of study abroad options. The purpose of the *Virginia Public Higher Education Guidelines for Study Abroad* (the Guidelines) is to support the ongoing definition of and adherence to exemplary practices concerning study abroad programs at Virginia's public institutions. These practices include evaluation and quality improvement, clear articulation of expectations for learning outcomes and student behavior, safety and risk management, legal responsibility, and codes of ethical conduct. In recognition of the disparate circumstances of Virginia institutions and the varying circumstances under which their students pursue educational experiences abroad, the Guidelines are deliberately designed to be flexible and to accommodate the full range of circumstances and complexities entailed in global travel.²

The Code defines "study abroad program" as "a program sponsored, offered, or approved for credit by an institution of higher education in which program participants travel outside the United States in connection with an educational experience." The breadth of this definition can reasonably encompass credit-bearing educational experiences that may involve highly variable levels of control by the institution. For purposes of distinguishing the kinds of experience that fall under this policy, the crucial criterion will be whether the student's home institution claims "ownership" for the experience. In the case of programs that are offered under the aegis of

¹ "The State Council of Higher Education shall...adopt such policies and regulations as the Council deems necessary to implement its duties established by state law. Each public institution of higher education shall comply with such policies and regulations."

² The Guidelines are consistent with both the Forum on Education Abroad publication, "Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad, 5th Edition" (2015) and the NAFSA-Association of International Educators publication, "Responsible Study Abroad: Good Practices for Health and Safety" (2002), both of which served as models for the Guidelines.

another institution or entity but for which the student's home institution grants advance approval for credit, the policy applies to the extent of verifying the legitimacy, creditworthiness, and basic safety of the program. Such approvals, however, do not imply that the student's home institution is liable or responsible for the student's experience in the program. SCHEV does not expect the Guidelines to be applied to more informal, ad hoc arrangements/experiences (e.g., graduate student travel for dissertation research, or after the fact requests for credit by students for programs or experiences pursued independently). Institutions should make a good faith effort to encourage students to engage institutional guidance/approval beforehand for all study abroad experiences. However, in cases where students act as independent agents, this policy should not be understood to imply any obligations or liability for the institution.

Guidelines

I. Approval, evaluation, and institutional support

Each public institution of higher education shall establish a standard process for approval, evaluation, quality improvement, and the delivery of appropriate institutional support for study abroad programs. In doing so, institutions may consider the following:

- A standard program approval process consistent with the policies of the institution.
- Articulation of how the program is integrated into the student's academic curriculum.
- Communication with students about the wide variety of program options and funding resources.
- Articulation of the learning objectives of each study abroad program and the expectations of student responsibility to achieve these learning objectives.
- A clear and accessible participant application process, including information regarding application requirements and the evaluation of all applicants.
- A statement concerning the standards of academic conduct, student evaluation, awarding of credit, academic integrity, and process for appeal.
- Communication with students about accessibility concerns and options for accommodating disabilities.
- A process by which study abroad programs managed by the institution regularly evaluate their activities and report outcomes to the institution.
- A process for screening study abroad programs hosted by third-party providers or international institutions.
- An ongoing process of quality improvement, for student learning as well as for administrative aspects of programs for which the institution is responsible.

II. Student conduct

Each public institution of higher education shall articulate its expectations of student conduct and provide adequate preparation to foster positive learning outcomes for study abroad participants. In doing so, institutions may consider the following:

- A clear and accessible policy concerning expectations of student behavior and consequences resulting from violations.
- A process for reviewing exceptions and ensuring fair and ethical treatment of all participants.
- The provision of appropriate preparation for study abroad. This may include pre-orientation, on-site training, and programming upon re-entry. Training topics may include safety, wellness, and information about cultural, historical, legal, political, and religious factors in the host country.
- The provision of ongoing academic advising concerning the activities and anticipated outcomes related to study abroad.

III. Health, safety, and risk management

Each public institution of higher education shall establish institutional policies and procedures concerning health, safety, security, and risk management for study abroad programs. In doing so, institutions may consider the following:

- Adequate faculty and staff training concerning their professional responsibilities while supervising study abroad programs, as well as training in general health and safety risks associated with study abroad.
- A written emergency plan applying to study abroad programs under the control of the institution and adequate support for such emergency plan.
- A written policy concerning the procedure for cancellation or discontinuation of a study abroad program.
- Regular monitoring of Travel Warnings by the United States Department of State.
- A standard protocol for allowing exceptions to policies regarding travel to countries with Travel Warnings.
- Consultation with federal authorities such as the Overseas Security Advisory Council, Department of State, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation regarding the risks associated with travel to certain areas.
- An institutional process for periodically assessing risks associated with study abroad programs, including periodic assessment of health and safety conditions for each study abroad host site, including a process for conducting site visits when appropriate and feasible.

- A clear policy governing requirements for participants to demonstrate proof of health insurance and repatriation and evacuation insurance as a prerequisite for participation in study abroad.

IV. Ethical and legal responsibilities

Each public institution of higher education shall establish institutional policies concerning ethical and legal responsibilities associated with study abroad. In doing so, institutions may consider the following:

- The adoption of an institutional code of ethics concerning study abroad, such as the Forum on Education Abroad's "Code of Ethics for Education Abroad, 2nd Edition," (2011).
- The provision of information to students regarding the institution's legal responsibilities, including its limits, concerning student study abroad.
- The provision of information to students regarding the legal responsibilities, including their limits, of third-party providers and international institutions.
- The provision of information to students regarding the health and safety risks associated with study abroad, both in general and with respect to particular locations/programs.
- A policy concerning ethical relationships with third-party providers and international institutions and conflict of interest avoidance.
- Periodic review of study abroad policies and protocols with the Office of the Attorney General.