

International Advisory Council
White Paper

“Increasing
University of Illinois at Chicago
Students’
Participation in and Access to
Study Abroad”

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Summary

The Study Abroad Office (SAO) within the Office of Global Engagement at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) has a proud tradition of offering high quality study abroad programs to an undergraduate population that has not traditionally participated in study abroad. Each year more than 200 of our remarkably diverse, first generation and high financial need students have participated in study abroad. In addition, SAO has leveraged more than \$1 million dollars to support students through in-kind provider discounts, prestigious Gilman Awards and other funds. Lastly, over the past two decades SAO has established at UIC professional best practices in international education. Although a small office, SAO is composed of highly skilled international educators and remains a strong foundation upon which rests the future of study abroad at UIC.

At the same time, a careful review of study abroad at UIC and benchmarked institutions demonstrates that the University should adopt several broad strategies that will increase access to and participation in study abroad. The central part of this strategy is developing sustained multi-year partnerships with grant funds for academic units and faculty to encourage them to create and lead programs. These new study abroad initiatives should include 1-2 week embedded programs as well as undergraduate and graduate research, internship and service-learning programs.

UIC should develop a distinctive UIC approach to study abroad that engages and reaches out to UIC students virtually and through a vibrant peer advocate program. In order to attract the “Gen Z” student, UIC should maximize the Global and Cross-Cultural Studies Certificate and other initiatives that enable students to participate in authentic global learning experiences that improve their professional and career prospects.

If UIC adopts these strategies, within five years the University will be a model for study abroad programming instead of lagging behind its peers. With a vibrant and growing study abroad program and its other global engagement initiatives, UIC will be truly “a globally connected campus community which supports faculty, staff and students as they address the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.”

Internationalization and Global Engagement Task Force Report

The UIC Internationalization and Global Engagement Task Force (2018) reviewed the challenges and barriers to creating a more globally engaged university. The Task Force also articulated a Global Engagement Vision for UIC to “serve the citizens of Chicago and the world by being an international leader in research, scholarship, and innovation, and by creating a globally connected campus community which supports faculty, staff and students as they address the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.”

A central element for creating a more globally engaged campus is increasing students' access to and participation in study abroad.¹ The task force found several barriers to expanding UIC students' access to study or education abroad.²

- Since UIC has the highest level of Pell eligible undergraduate students among Research I universities, very high levels of underrepresented students and first generation students, the cost of a study abroad program is a major barrier, and opportunity costs are a challenge for the many students who work during the academic year and summers.
- There are students in many majors who do not see a UIC program that seems suited to their major and their interests.
 - In Nursing, for example, many students are interested in service programs such as medical missions, but historically UIC has not offered such programs.
 - In Engineering and many other colleges, students want research-focused opportunities, but UIC offers very few of these program, especially faculty-led options.
 - In Business and many other colleges, students are seeking international internships but there are few or no such options in the colleges where internships are managed.
- Another common challenge is that faculty members and many support staff are not aware of how study abroad can work in their students' degrees. They incorrectly believe that study abroad only works as a general education option.
- The limited engagement and collaboration between the UIC Study Abroad Office (SAO) and academic units has kept UIC from developing and offering the full range of programs that would bring in faculty and gain support from the colleges.

The Task Force Report articulated a study abroad goal of increasing student access to and participation in study abroad in order to prepare graduates to tackle 21st century global challenges. To achieve this goal, the report suggested several approaches:

- Encourage and provide support to faculty to develop and lead study abroad programs, including multi-week summer programs, 2-3 week stand-alone programs and 1 or 2-week programs “embedded” in semester-long classes.
- Raise awareness on the part of students, parents and faculty about study abroad by incorporating it into all recruitment, visitation and orientation activities.
- Create and deliver on-campus first-year “gateway courses” that encourage students to seek study abroad programs.
- Provide seed funds to develop more faculty-led study abroad programs.
- Adjust the academic calendar to provide more 2-3 week stand-alone periods for study abroad programs (e.g. “J-term” and “Maymester”).

¹ Study abroad or education abroad is defined as “education, including, but not limited to, enrollment in courses, experiential learning, internships, service learning, and other learning activities, which occurs outside the participant's home country, the country in which they are enrolled as a student, or the country in which they are employed. . . .” (Forum for Education Abroad, “Glossary,” <https://forumea.org/resources/glossary/?letter=E>, accessed March 25, 2020)

² University of Illinois at Chicago, Internationalization and Global Engagement Task Force Report, April 2018 (<https://uofi.app.box.com/s/v349f1l8cj3qiqoj3wqdzpk21yh2yrlo>, accessed March 15, 2020).

- Create an undergraduate Global Studies Certificate that integrates study abroad into existing majors along with international coursework within the major.

UIC’s Study Abroad Enrollment

A review of UIC’s study abroad historical enrollments also indicates a number of opportunities to increase participation.³

Enrollment	UIC Study Abroad Office Programs	Study Abroad Programs Nationally
Average Annual Student Enrollment	182	852,340
Study Abroad Enrollment as % of Undergraduate Enrollment	1.0%	1.7%

Most importantly, UIC’s average annual study abroad enrollment is 1.0% of our undergraduate population while the national average is 1.7%. Although the IIE Open Doors Report does not calculate averages by university sector, Research I universities have much higher rates of participation than the national average which includes community colleges and less selective institutions, many of whom have few or no study abroad programs. To reach the lower range of the Research I average (~3%), UIC would have to triple its study abroad enrollment.

Program Duration	SAO	Nationally
One Semester	38.4%	31.5%
Academic Year	2.5%	2.3%
Summer 2-8 Weeks	58.9%	30.6%
Less Than 2 Weeks (Summer)	0.0%	5.2%
Less Than 2 Weeks (Academic Year)	0.0%	11.0%

In addition, 16.2% of the national study abroad population participated in programs of less than two weeks duration, many of which were programs “embedded” into semester-long courses. The most common model is a spring semester course with an embedded spring break study abroad program. In some cases these programs also include international virtual education collaboration (IVEC) between classes at the U.S. institution and an overseas partner.

Despite a student population for whom costs (up-front program costs and opportunity costs) are a major obstacle, UIC has relied more heavily upon semester-long programs and long summer programs than the national average. These kinds of programs together are 97.3% of UIC’s study abroad enrollment versus 62.1% nationally. The loss of potential income during the summer makes summer study abroad especially problematic for UIC students.

³ The tables which follow are based on comparative data from the Study Abroad Office and the Institute for International Education over the three-years of 2014-2017 (Institute for International Education, “Open Doors Report,” 2018 (<https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors>, accessed August 1, 2019).

Race/Ethnicity	SAO Enrollment	UIC Enrollment	Ratio of SAO to UIC
Asian-American/PIs	17.6%	23.7%	74.4%
African-American	7.5%	8.3%	90.4%
Latinx/Hispanic	25.4%	29.4%	86.4%
White	46.6%	34.9%	133.6%
Multiracial	0.2%	2.0%	10.2%
Other	2.7%	1.7%	153.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In terms of our student demographics, UIC has lower rates of study abroad participation among underrepresented students, particularly among Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders. Another way to consider this is that although “white” students are 34.9% of the UIC population, they were 46.6% of the study abroad population.

Top 20 Study Abroad Destinations	IIE Nat'l Rank	% of Total	% of Total UIC Study Abroad	Ratio of UIC to Nat'l
Cuba	15	1.4%	0.0%	0.00%
South Africa	11	1.8%	0.18%	10.00%
Costa Rica	9	2.5%	0.53%	21.20%
Czech Republic	13	1.4%	0.53%	37.86%
India	14	1.4%	0.71%	50.71%
United Kingdom	1	12.0%	7.6%	63.31%
Australia	8	3.0%	1.9%	64.78%
Mexico	12	1.6%	1.4%	87.50%
China	6	3.6%	3.5%	98.15%
Italy	2	10.7%	10.6%	99.38%
Greece	17	1.3%	1.6%	122.32%
Japan	10	2.3%	2.8%	122.91%
Ireland	7	3.4%	4.9%	145.50%
France	4	5.2%	8.0%	153.88%
S. Korea	18	1.1%	2.5%	224.86%
Germany	5	3.7%	8.5%	229.20%
Chile	19	0.9%	2.1%	235.57%
Spain	3	9.3%	23.0%	246.97%
Denmark	16	1.3%	3.7%	285.40%
Poland	20	0.3%	4.1%	1354.53%
Other Countries		31.9%	11.9%	37.30%
Total		100.0%	100.1%	

A review of program destinations demonstrates some of the strengths of UIC programming, particularly our success with programs in Spain (the 3rd most common destination for U.S. students), France (4th most common) and Germany (5th most common). On the other hand, UIC has historically had relatively few students in the United Kingdom, by far the most popular study abroad destination with 12% of all study abroad students nationally. Other destinations which have been underutilized by UIC are Australia, Costa Rica, South Africa, the Czech Republic and Cuba, which rank from between 8th and 15th among the top 20 destinations nationally.

A careful study of average study enrollment by academic program also shows a number of areas of success and targets of opportunity. While Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) study abroad enrollment closely matches its share of the undergraduate population (55.4% versus 52.6%), there are several academic programs within LAS where study abroad enrollment is low (Chemistry and Mathematics, Statistics & Computer Science).

The College of Architecture, Design and the Arts (CADA) has also been successful with their students constituting 10.6% of the study abroad enrollment versus 5.7% of the general student population. Within the college, however, music majors, who are .45% of the university population, did not participate at all in study abroad. Together the College of Applied Health Science and the School of Public Health have a larger share of the study abroad population (10.1%) than their share of the undergraduate population (7.2%).

Among other colleges, the College of Engineering has the greatest discrepancy between its study abroad enrollment (3.3%) and its share of the student population (17%). The College of Education also has a significantly lower share of study abroad enrollment (0.9%) than its share of the undergraduate population (1.82%).

Understanding “Gen Z” Students and Study Abroad

Any strategy for increasing UIC students’ participation in study abroad should also consider what motivates current undergraduates. This means understanding the sensibilities of the “Generation Z” or “Gen Z” student. One of the most often read analyses of Gen Z students and higher education was published as a pamphlet by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Jeffrey J. Selingo authored “The New Generation of Students: How Colleges Can Recruit, Teach, and Serve Gen Z” just as students born after 1996⁴ had started to appear on college campuses.⁵ Although Selingo does not directly address study abroad, his analysis should shape how universities think about their students and study abroad.

Some of the key characteristics of Gen Z students, according to Selingo, include the following:

- Their generation is the most diverse demographically and in terms of self-identity.

⁴ Michael Dimock, “Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins,” Pew Research Center, January 17, 2019 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>, accessed March 23, 2020)

⁵ Jeffrey J. Selingo, “The New Generation of Students: How Colleges Can Recruit, Teach, and Serve Gen Z,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2018.

- They are financially needy and concerned about debt as a result of the Great Recession.
- They are skeptical about the value of higher education and expect higher education to demonstrate its value by leading them into successful careers.
- They are highly engaged with technology (YouTube is their “go to” tool for research).
- They seek authentic educational, social and cultural connections which are often in-person.

Given the generation’s characteristics, Katherine LaGrave argues that international educators must design serious and purposeful study abroad programs that engage students who are driven by the contradictory desire for a sense of “mission” or purpose and deep concerns about the cost of studying abroad. As Amy Ruhter McMillan at IES Abroad argues, Gen Z students want to “gain real-world exposure . . . move toward their degree, and stand out for a job. . . .”⁶ In addition, because this generation is very tech savvy, universities must bring students to study abroad through an engaging online presence and an easily accessible online platform.

Studies in Success

Fortunately there are many institutions that have faced and overcome challenges similar to those at UIC. The UIC Task Force benchmarked Research I universities which have been awarded the highest honor in international education, the NAFSA Simon Award. Four of these aspirant institutions were celebrated for their successful practices in study abroad.

Georgia Tech—“International Plan”

The Georgia Institute of Technology is one of the nation’s best STEM universities and is particularly strong in Engineering, an area underrepresented in study abroad. Nevertheless, although Georgia Tech has far fewer undergraduates than UIC, they send abroad more than one thousand students each year. The key to their success is their “International Plan” which integrates study abroad into existing majors.

University of Pittsburgh—Faculty-Led Programs

For the University of Pittsburgh, the key to their success in increasing study abroad enrollment is developing faculty-led programs. Previously Pitt focused on third-party providers, similar to the approach taken by UIC’s SAO. By the time Pitt received the Simon Award, they had one hundred faculty-led “Panther Programs.” In addition, 45% of Pitt’s engineering majors and 50% of their business majors study abroad.

NC State University—“Traveling While...”

Another STEM-focused university, NC State, has encouraged underserved minority and low-income students to participate in study abroad. They developed a marketing campaign initially called “People Like Me” (later changed to “Traveling While. . .”). It is a tool to engage a broader segment of the university community of students, faculty and staff. In part this means developing close partnerships with various units and campus offices, including the Diversity Office. The University also launched a Global Perspectives Certificate that allows students to gain an international credential in addition to their degree program.

⁶ Katherine LaGrave, “For Gen Z, Study Abroad Is About Way More Than Drinking Through Europe,” Condé Nast, <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/for-gen-z-study-abroad-is-about-way-more-than-drinking-through-europe>.

UCLA—Peer Advisors

Amongst Research I universities, UCLA has a higher percent of underrepresented undergraduate students (~70%) than UIC. In addition, 35% of UCLA undergraduates are Pell-eligible. Despite these challenges, 5% of UCLA's undergraduates study abroad each year. One of the points of pride for UCLA is its strong study abroad peer advisor program. This proved an effective way to engage students, particularly underrepresented students who may be deterred because they feel study abroad is not for students like them.

UIC's Way Forward

Based on the Task Force Report, a review of UIC's study abroad enrollment, and best practices in the field, there are several broad strategies that should be adopted in order to increase UIC's study abroad enrollment to the national norm or above. The key initiatives are as follows:

- Create long-term sustained partnerships with targeted academic units, providing ongoing support and multi-year seed grants for units and professional development funds for faculty to develop, launch and lead new programs.
- Seek ways to remove disincentives for faculty and academic units to support study abroad programs such as the potential loss of tuition revenue or the cancellation of regular session campus classes when students choose to study abroad.
- Use existing UIC and external models to advocate for the inclusion of international education and particularly study abroad program development and teaching in the research and teaching components of promotion and tenure.
- Develop more short-term study abroad programs, particularly 1-2 week programs “embedded” in courses offered on the campus. These programs provide greater flexibility for faculty members and students and are significantly less expensive for students.
- Articulate a UIC study abroad “brand” or ethos that is aligned with the values, character and history of UIC.
- Ensure that students are engaged through social media and an easily navigable web presence, and they are easily able to research and apply for study abroad programs online.
- Support and facilitate academic units to develop research-based study abroad, including graduate level research, dual degrees and Cotutelle.
- Collaborate with academic units to develop and sustain internship and service-learning programs.
- Promote the Global and Cross-Cultural Studies Certificate because it will enable students to customize their global learning and promote their professional advancement.
- Expand the peer advisers program to reach students—particularly underrepresented students—where they “live.”

If UIC adopts these strategies, within five years the University will be a leader in study abroad instead of lagging behind its peers. With an expanding and vibrant study abroad program along with other global engagement initiatives, UIC will be “a globally connected campus community which supports faculty, staff and students as they address the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.”