Study Abroad Information for Nontraditional Students

I'm thinking of studying abroad, but I'm not sure if it's right for me:

Okay, so you have dreamt of studying abroad, but you aren't sure it's right for you and you feel it's a little out of your reach. You have heard of younger students who have studied for a semester in England or India, or sailed around the world on Semester-at-Sea, and you feel there isn't any way you can be away that long from your responsibilities. You assume the cost is too much and you'll never be able to afford it. So you let your dream slip away...

Not so STUDY ABROAD IS FOR EVERYONE! There are short-term programs, such 3-week summer courses in Ireland or Athens, or 5-week programs in Spain or South Africa. You can study almost anywhere from 3 weeks to an entire year, depending on your time and financial constraints. Short-term study abroad fits easily into a busy schedule and is less expensive than a full semester abroad. Federal, state, and campus-based financial aid, with the exception of Federal Work-Study, will apply to study abroad, and you can also fill out a Cost of Increase for Study Abroad form for additional financial assistance. Also, CGS Student Government (for CGS students) and the Study Abroad Office offers scholarships. Visit the Finances pages to view some options for funding study abroad programs.

If you are a UPMC or Pitt employee, see the list of programs that are eligible for tuition benefits.

Okay, study abroad is an option for me, but...

It's still a big commitment. How can studying abroad add to me life?

Academically: You'll receive credit for an international learning experience and a chance to study your chosen subject in a different academic setting.
You will gain:

- feeling that you are a part of a greater global community
- a broader awareness of world affairs, international and intercultural issues
- an addition to your resume that will allow you stand out

Personally:
You will gain:

- an understanding of another culture
- a greater sense of self-awareness, self-confidence, and independence
- an experience of a lifetime!

Professionally: An international learning experience can improve your professional potential. You will gain:

- a global, competitive edge over others in your field

- an understanding of the United States' ability to complete in the global arena.

The following is an excerpt from "Global Competence & National Needs", a visionary report from the Commission of the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, illustrating the importance of an international study experience:

> "American corporations understand the importance of these issues [Globalization and Economic Competitiveness]. Increasingly, business leaders recognize that they must be able to draw on people with global skills if their corporations are to succeed:
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> Fully one in six American jobs is now tied to international trade. Corporate leaders rank international curricula high on their priority list of what's important in American higher education. Texas recently reported a nearly sixfold increase during the 1990s in specification of international experience as part of the skill set for senior-level positions--from a requirement for 4 percent of senior positions to 28 percent.
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> There is near unanimity among American personnel officers that job applicants with international experience are likely to possess desirable skills in cross-cultural communication, cultural awareness, leadership, and independence, according to a 2004 survey completed by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)." from The Commission of the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, November 2005

<u>The Study Abroad Process for Non-traditional Students</u>

I'm not sure where to go:

As a Pitt student, you can go almost ANYWHERE! What you need to decide is where you want to go and want you want to accomplish.

Start by thinking of a city, region or country you would like to visit and what you would like to study, and then try to narrow your interests. Do you want to study in a small town or a large city? Are you proficient in another language, or do you only speak English (you'd be surprised how many nations speak English as a first or second language). What size school are you looking for ☐ a large campus or a smaller setting? Are you looking for an experience that will give you a competitive edge or one that is more personally fulfilling? Do you want to walk to

class or do you mind taking a bus? Do you want to stay in a dormitory, a home-stay, or an apartment? Do you want to be completely independent or always with a group?

Once you have narrowed your interests, then it is much easier to begin your search. For example, maybe you've always dreamed of travelling to Spain or Argentina? Go to the Study Abroad website, www.abroad.pitt.edu, click on " Programs," and "Search by Country." Click on Spain or Argentina, and explore the programs listed there. Look for programs with attributes that fit your parameters.

I'm not sure what courses to take:

Talk to your academic advisor: Schedule an appointment to discuss your thoughts with your advisor about studying abroad. Together you can look at your Degree Progress Report and see how study abroad can fit in your academic timeline. Your advisor can suggest whether you should take a class to satisfy your major/minor requirement or an elective.

Explore the Study Abroad website: www.abroad.pitt.edu. The "Getting Started" link outlines the steps you need to follow to make the study abroad process easier, and the "Study Abroad Programs" will help you narrow your search.

Visit the Study Abroad Office, 802 William Pitt Union: Look at the brochures in the Resource Area and talk to the staff on hand to help find the perfect program for your needs and interests.

Attend a Study Abroad Essential's Meeting:
All students planning to study abroad are required to attend a mandatory Study Abroad Essentials Session. These 45 minute workshops, offered three times every week, will give you the information you need to begin the Study Abroad Process. Topics include a full range from program selection, receiving credit, having your courses approved, to transferring financial aid. This is a very important first step. Essentials sessions give you a great opportunity to ask questions, narrow down program choices, and gain valuable insight on how you will study abroad. You will also have the opportunity to meet other students beginning the process, you'll get to hear what some of your peers are planning to do, and maybe get additional ideas for yourself. There are generally 15 students in each essentials session. Sign up for Essentials by visiting www.abroad.pitt.edu.

Talk to former CGS/nontraditional students who studied abroad: Lauren Pucci is currently a Graduate Student Assistant with the Study Abroad Office and can arrange for you to meet CGS students who have studied abroad in Africa, Ireland, Italy and England. You can visit her during office hours in the McCarl Center between 3-5pm on Thursdays or contact her via email at lep46@pitt.edu.

Issues Specific to Non-traditional Students

And I'm worried about...

Age issues: More than likely, as a nontraditional student, you will be a little (or a lot) older than the other students in your class/program. You may be worried that you won't fit in, that you won't have anyone to hang around with, and that you'll stand out in the crowd. These all may happen, but that doesn't mean it's a negative ☐ it all depends on your attitude. Your age, maturity and life experience can be a great advantage! Take advantage of not following the pack to the nearest hangout every night, and instead explore the culture you are living in. One female nontraditional CGS student who studied in Africa during a summer program reported that when the traditional-aged students had free time, they huddled together with their American classmates in the group dormitory all night; whereas the older CGS student explored the village, stopping to talk to local shop owners and the elderly. She thought the traditional-aged students really missed out on a fantastic learning experience. The CGS student felt she had "been there, done that" when she was younger, and she wanted a different experience in Africa than hanging out with other Americans.

You will stand out in the crowd especially to other nontraditional students studying abroad who are feeling the same way you are. Remember, depending on the program, other nontraditional students may also be in your class. A 41 year old Pitt who student studied in London was very surprised to find almost half of her class were nontraditional-aged students, either taking the class for credit or professional/personal enrichment. The older students naturally gravitated towards each other and became fast friends by the end of the week. None of the students were native to London and were in the same predicament, looking to find others their own age to have dinner or coffee with.

Faculty will also notice you and you may have more in common with them than you think. Previous nontraditional students who have studied abroad have reported that professors and TAs are especially interested in speaking with them precisely because they are older and have more experience.

Older students also report that they feel more confident in exploring alone, precisely because they have been on their own and living independently. Count yourself fortunate that you are older, and maybe a little wiser, than your younger classmates and take advantage of this time to relish your independence and maturity.

Asking my boss for time off: You may be working part- or full-time and are wondering how you can get the extra time off to study abroad? The first thing to realize is that you don't have to study abroad for an entire semester. There are many short-term programs, between 3 and 12 weeks that you can attend during the summer. You may find a 3-week/3-credit program that will fulfill a general education requirement and will allow you to travel to your dream destination. The only way to discover whether you can take your vacation time all at once or get a short leave of absence is to ask! One student who works full-time for the University was extremely nervous about asking for the time off and put the request off for weeks. When she finally asked, there was no problem ☐ the director of the department was very supportive of study abroad. The student felt that her solid study abroad plan gave her the justification to get the time off.

Stress issues: All students, no matter their age, feel stress when considering studying abroad. Everyone fears the unknown and has concerns about personal safety. Nontraditional students, however, may have additional concerns. You may worry about leaving your children, spouse, or elderly parents. Many older students also have numerous job and community obligations, and may worry about leaving home for 3 weeks or a month. Each instance must be considered within its own context and be weighed against the many advantages of a study abroad experience.

Normally, students go through similar psychological pattern of stress and culture shock when they study abroad. The University of the Pacific, CA, has a great On-Line Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad entitled "What's Up With Culture?" Go to Section 1.7.1: Common Reactions to read about stress and study abroad culture shock.

Marketing the Study Abroad Experience

Once I return from studying abroad, how do I market my experience?
The Study Abroad Office offers two workshops to help returnees market their international experience:

Resume Writing: learn effective resume writing strategies that reflect your international experience

Interviewing: learn about the best strategies for talking about international experiences is a professional or academic interview.
Visit the Alumni pages for additional information on marketing the study abroad experience.

The Study Abroad Process for Non-traditional Students

University of Pittsburgh Faculty and Staff Tuition Benefits
The University of Pittsburgh encourages international study and endeavors to make available education benefits to eligible faculty, eligible staff, and their eligible dependents.

The eligibility and the benefits are on the same basis as are available for enrollment at each of the five campuses Oakland, Bradford, Greensburg, Johnstown, and Titusville. Refer to Policies applicable to active faculty and staff and separated faculty and staff for reasons of retirement, disability, or death. On a limited basis, benefits are available on the same basis as are available to faculty and staff who fulfill the requirements for the program for benefits to other institutions, which was discontinued in 1994.

The benefits are applicable to tuition remission transactions which do not require a cash remittance to the institution where the study is taking place and/or the program through which the study is taking place.

(Education benefits programs are distinct and separate from the Tuition Exchange Program which is subject to the policies of the Tuition Exchange Program and as well the policies of the college or university where the student is matriculating.)

Please note: Final decision as to the eligibility for benefits for a specific program will be made by Faculty Records or Human Resources.

For More Info:
For Staff:
Human Resources & Benefits
412-624-8068

For Faculty:
Faculty Records
412-624-4232