

## When Faculty Teach Abroad

**Guidelines, policies, and procedures are useful as faculty interest in teaching abroad is on the rise.**

**A**S THE NUMBER OF FACULTY-LED PROGRAMS CONTINUES TO INCREASE, designing well-developed and clearly defined policies for faculty to follow when teaching abroad is becoming a more urgent need, and a matter that is receiving new, or renewed, attention on many campuses. These policies can cover a myriad of issues such as the process for selecting faculty; ensuring that education abroad programs are being conducted in compliance with departmental, institutional, and sometimes state rules and policies; rules and expectations concerning the nature and extent of faculty responsibilities while teaching abroad; and the growing concern on many campuses about health, safety, and risk management issues.

The University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh (UW-Oshkosh) centralized education abroad into one support office and created policies both to ensure consistency in their application, financial, risk management, and other processes, as well as increasing support for faculty teaching abroad. Ensuring the faculty are in compliance with existing policies about teaching abroad is an important aspect of the office.

“Most of it is based on what we, as an institution, are allowed to do legally, and what rules might be out there that you might run afoul of if you don’t have somebody to help you walk through the process, or someone to smooth the process ahead of you,” says Jenna Graff, director of the Office of International Education at UW-Oshkosh. “For example, before we opened this office, faculty didn’t know that there were specific university accounts that you had to deposit your money into. So the departments would set up their own accounts, and not know that there had to be, by state policy, a centralized account, that there were specific policies that governed that type of account that limited spending, or that there were rules about the way you could spend your money. Or there might be academic issues: faculty might propose to teach a course that couldn’t be offered as a field experience or a course that only majors could take for a department that doesn’t have enough majors to

make the course viable as an education abroad course. What we’ve tried to do is to bring all the existing institutional and state policies and guidelines into clear view for professors so they know in advance, ‘This is the track I need to follow. If I follow this track I’m not going to be running into roadblocks.’ Getting that kind of thing ironed out in advance saves professors a lot of frustration.”

Most professors are extremely grateful for the help, Graff says. “When we created this office, we thought we would really have to market the idea, that faculty would resist our involvement. Instead, they were just knocking down the doors. They would say, ‘I used to have to do hundreds of hours of work, and bang my head against every wall on campus to get this done: now you’re doing it for me!’ It’s worked out well.”

### **Planning Programs and Selecting Faculty for Teaching Abroad**

At the University of Texas-Austin (UT-Austin), more than 2,000 students participate in education abroad annually. Monya Lemery is program development team leader for education abroad, a position that involves supervising five program coordinators who are solely in charge of developing a portfolio of faculty-led programs. “A number of our programs are run out of the study abroad office. These programs go through

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a very organized, competitive selection process,” Lemery says. “We also have another group of programs that are administered in the colleges, schools, and departments on campus. So we have both a centralized and a decentralized system.”

Programs operated out of the UT-Austin education abroad office are on a three-year approval cycle, with programs running either for three consecutive years, or every other year. When the next cycle begins, approval must be renewed for another three-year cycle. “Most of the proposals we get are good proposals,” Lemery says. “But we get more proposals than we can accept. The proposals have to be approved through the department and the college. The study abroad office also looks at them in terms of health and safety issues, and risk, and in terms of program design, to see if it’s even viable. Then once all of those things are checked, the proposals go to a faculty committee for review, and the faculty makes recommendations for approval, in order of priority, so that if we can’t offer as many programs as they approve, we know where to cut the list off.”

The three-year cycle helps keep only current programs on the books: and it is more efficient than the previous system, which required renewing program approval every year.

At the University of Utah, the Center for Learning Abroad has recently implemented the use of a standardized form for faculty to use in proposing new programs. “One of the very basic things that we did was to create the form, to expedite our ability to review the proposals in a more effective way,” says Beth Laux, associate director of the center. “Before we just had a list of questions that faculty would answer. The form helps us make sure faculty have answered all the questions. It also opens up the narrative. In the past, sometimes faculty were trying so hard to answer all of the questions, but there wasn’t necessarily a good description of the academic component, and what it was meant to accomplish. It also didn’t necessarily address how the program fit within the context of the subject area, and within the context of the university curriculum. Our hope is that the new form will encourage faculty to think about including coursework that could meet general education requirements, which would expand their target audience substantially. We also added a safety, security, and health assessment. The faculty don’t do that part: we certainly invite them to participate, but that is something that our office conducts in consultation with them.”

Some institutions have established across-the-board eligibility requirements for faculty to be



considered for teaching abroad. At the University of Texas-Austin (UT-Austin) only full-time faculty may be considered, and they must be approved by their chairs and deans. At other institutions the policies are more flexible.

“We leave it up to each individual department to determine what the relevant qualifications are within the particular field of study,” says Laux.

At Western Illinois University and UW-Oshkosh, both adjunct and retired faculty may be considered for teaching abroad, though Graff is quick to add that adjunct faculty would only be considered for teaching abroad if they had a well-established, long-term relationship with the institution.

At UW-Oshkosh, a rigorous procedure for faculty selection is followed, beginning at the departmental level and ending with approval by the provost. Each department has its own criteria for the selection of program leaders, who are approved first by the department to teach specific courses and then by the dean. Next, the Office of International Education shares a list of all university personnel who will accompany the group with the affirmative action office, human resources, and administrative services. Affirmative action and HR share any issues or concerns directly with the provost, who makes final decisions about participation by university personnel in education abroad. (No confidential information is shared with the Office of International Education.) “Faculty or staff who have past-due emergency cash advances are not eligible to lead programs since all program leaders must be provided with emergency cash reserves,” Graff adds.

Many institutions are adding required attendance at faculty workshops and orientations as a requirement for teaching abroad. At UT-Austin, all faculty teaching under the auspices of the education abroad office must attend a health and safety workshop before teaching abroad, which is a requirement that may be extended to all faculty teaching abroad in the future.

UW-Oshkosh has a more frequent training for faculty teaching abroad. “We train faculty every time they leave: if they leave twice a year, they come to training twice a

## ONLINE RESOURCES

### Proposal Form for Faculty-Led Programs at the University of Utah

[http://learningabroad.utah.edu/ie/New\\_LA\\_Prog.php](http://learningabroad.utah.edu/ie/New_LA_Prog.php)

### Proposing Study Abroad at the University of Texas-Austin

<http://world.utexas.edu/abroad/faculty/proposing>

### Faculty Guide (including proposal process, pgs. 8-27) University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

<http://www.uwosh.edu/oie/fac/FacultyGuide.pdf>

year,” says Graff. “A lot of what we do in the orientation is in response to incidents that have happened to professors while they’re abroad and requests from them to address certain types of situations.”

The University of Utah requires faculty who are teaching abroad to participate in orientations offered twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring.

“New faculty really need to be there,” says Laux, adding that it’s open to all faculty, “and in the long run I think even some of our veteran faculty will come every year. They find that to be part of the supportive role we can play, in providing them with a refresher.”

### Health, Safety, Student Behavior, and Other Risk Management Issues

At UT-Austin, although programs that are run under the decentralized model are independent of the education abroad office, all university programs are required to submit information to the university’s education abroad portal, so that the whereabouts of all students and professors engaged in education abroad can be tracked.

“There was a big push to centralize faculty-led programs about eight years ago,” Lemery explains. “At that time there were a number of programs that had been running for years. They didn’t really need help, they knew what they were doing and were doing a great job. But it was realized that for faculty who had never taken students abroad and were thinking about doing so, there was a need for assistance: to help faculty get the programs up and going in terms of logistics and recruiting,

to help them think through health and safety issues, to help the students with advising questions and financial aid, those kinds of things.”

About three years ago the university hired an international risk analyst who has been involved in ongoing policy development. “That has been tremendous,” says Lemery. “And one of the policies that just went into effect last year is a requirement for all programs to go through a health and safety assessment. We are bringing all programs on campus into the fold more and more, with the emphasis on the health and safety and risk management aspects of the programs. There have also been some policy changes in the last year concerning insurance coverage and emergency evacuation policy. There’s been a lot of tightening up in terms of the health and safety aspect of the programs.”

At Western Illinois University, where increasing the number of faculty-led programs is part of the administration’s strategic initiative, a process is underway to update and more clearly define the role of faculty who are teaching abroad. Currently the focus is on defining policies that have to do with student behavioral issues.

“We have institutional policies that apply to situations that come up during study abroad,” says Emily Gorlewski, assistant director of education abroad. “But professors are often not familiar with this role, or these policies. We’ve realized that not laying out the expectations for faculty explicitly and in writing beforehand can cause some confusion. Sometimes they just follow their own initiative when situations arise that would be handled by student affairs if they oc-

curred on campus. Things are happening quickly, and they have to make decisions on the spot.” She adds, “We have to bridge the gap between student affairs on campus, and what happens off campus.” They are currently updating their faculty handbook to provide guidance in such situations.

Providing faculty with very specific information and training that covers these kinds of issues is being seen as a necessary part of a well-run program on many campuses.

“Anybody who has worked in education abroad recognizes that even the best-laid plans never pan out quite exactly the way you expected them to, which makes this a high-stress activity both for administrators and for faculty,” says Laux. “Well-developed policies take away some of the administrative burden and ambiguity so that faculty can focus on the academic components of their programs.”

“Probably the biggest thing we’ve done regarding the onsite experience is to come up with a risk management plan,” says Graff. This is not necessarily because we have more incidents now than we used to, but because faculty are more proactive in trying to head things off, especially behavioral issues. We have a process in place for them to follow so that students understand that it’s not just a professor complaining about their behavior: it’s something serious that could affect their grade, could even affect their ability to stay on the program. We’re really focusing on making sure that the professors understand how to resolve these situations in order to alleviate the pressures on their programs.”

### Lessons Learned

When asked what advice they would offer those working on defining policies for teaching abroad, everyone seems to agree that turning to colleagues in the field for guidance is a good idea.

One key takeaway? “Don’t reinvent the wheel,” says Laux. “There are many institutions that have policies in place and would be willing to share them; a lot of this kind of thing is online now. And even though ‘borrowed’ policies have to be adapted, they can serve as a baseline for developing policies that meet your needs. Talk to colleagues before starting from scratch.”

Lemery agrees: “Get some samples from other institutions of what they have done, just to give you some idea of what you might want. Then really look at your own institution’s policies and see how they apply to study abroad.”

“One of the things I’ve learned is that policy development is an ongoing, never ending process,” says Laux.

It’s okay to start small. “I think it’s realistic to start with something small and build it out over time, not try to develop everything all at once,” explains Lemery. “We are constantly finding things that come up, and we don’t have a policy for it. Sometimes we think that’s okay, and other times we think, ‘Maybe we need a policy for that.’ That’s just a constant part of our work.”

Developing and implementing well-defined policies regarding faculty teaching abroad may take effort and may seem laborious, but it is well worth the effort. “It provides infrastructure for growth and a common ground when disputes occur,” says

Laux. “It also helps the institution with risk management, and on a very basic level, it provides a clarification of roles.”

An added bonus to having well-defined policies is that more faculty on campus become aware of the opportunity to teach abroad just by knowing such policies exist. “Well-defined policies help encourage participation in study abroad by more departments, colleges, professors, and students,” says Graff. “It’s much easier [for faculty] to propose and develop a new program if they know the rules and the processes in advance.” **IE**

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