



Education Abroad Advising to Students with Disabilities

By Heidi M. Soneson

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About the Author

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Introduction

This guide provides education abroad advisers with valuable procedures and resources to assist them in supporting students with disabilities who are planning to study abroad. It includes advising guidelines, tools for identifying student disability-related accommodation needs, methods to assess overseas accommodation capacity, predeparture preparation materials, and ways to foster disclosure so that advisers are informed about student needs before the student embarks on an overseas experience. It also provides Web links to additional resources and in-depth information about particular areas. This guide gives education abroad advisers resources they need to guide students with disabilities through the advising and predeparture preparation process to help facilitate a smooth and successful overseas experience.

Why It Matters

The population of students studying abroad is diversifying rapidly—students with different ethnic backgrounds, academic majors, age, socio-economic status, and students with disabilities are increasingly seeking opportunities overseas. U.S. colleges and education departments are also frequently incorporating education abroad opportunities into their major and minor requirements for students, and this brings new and interested groups of students to the education abroad office for advising on appropriate overseas options.

Education abroad advisers are seeing greater numbers of students with disabilities who are investigating education abroad opportunities as part of their undergraduate educational experience. To provide equal access to those students with disabilities, U.S. institutions often provide a wide range of support services on their campuses. These include ramp access to buildings, extra time on tests or a private testing environment, sign-language interpreters, converting print material into an electronic format, and notetakers. Students' needs vary, even if they have the same disability, and the specific needs may be easy to make arrangements for or may require advanced planning. For education abroad, a particular accommodation may not be possible, but other low- or no-cost accommodations may equally reduce the barrier that the individual experiences.

According to *Open Doors*, more than 1,000 students with disabilities studied abroad in 2006-2007. Of these students, half reported a learning disability, 25 percent reported a mental health condition, and the remaining 25 percent were students with physical, sensory, or other disabilities (<http://www.miusa.org/newsitems/opendoorsdisabilitystats>). To serve these diverse populations, education abroad advisers need to encourage students to disclose their needs early and should have key advising tools in place so that appropriate guidance and planning can take place before a student embarks on a significant academic, personal, and cultural experience overseas.

What Is a Disability?

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (www.ada.gov/) an individual with a disability is a person who:

1. has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities;
2. has a record of such impairment; or
3. is regarded as having such an impairment.

In 2003-2004, 11 percent of U.S. undergraduates reported having a disability (**U.S. Census Bureau**, www.census.gov/compendia/statab/), and this number has likely grown as U.S. campuses continue to provide equal access for all individuals.

It is important to remember that a student's disability may be visible or invisible. Those with a visible disability can include a wheelchair user, someone who is blind, or someone who is an amputee. Invisible disabilities include a hearing impairment, attention deficit disorder (ADD), diabetes, learning disabilities, and mental health disorders.

At the University of Minnesota, 80 percent of the 1,700 students with a registered disability in 2007-2008 had an invisible disability. The **National Institute of Mental Health** (www.nimh.nih.gov/) reports that one in four Americans has some form of mental illness that is diagnosable and treatable, including depression, anxiety disorders, and bipolar disorder.

To assist students with disabilities in identifying education abroad experiences, it is helpful to be familiar with the different kinds of disabilities and some of the accommodations that are provided on U.S. campuses. The following two resources provide helpful information:

Mobility International USA/National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (<http://www.miusa.org/ncde>), a non-profit clearinghouse sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, provides information and resources on disability and study abroad, detailed tip sheets on specific types of disabilities, education abroad articles written by participants with disabilities, scholarship resource lists, and free publications on international exchange and disability topics.

The Disability Services Office at the **University of Minnesota** (<http://ds.umn.edu/disabilities/>) provides a useful description of some of the most common visible and invisible disabilities and includes typical accommodations that are often needed for each type of disability. This information can help education advisers proactively plan for requests that may arise. The list includes the following disability types:

- **Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder:** ADHD is a neurological condition that affects learning and behavior. People with a formal diagnosis of ADHD may have difficulties with information processing and concentration.
- **Autism Spectrum Disorder:** ASD is a developmental disability that is characterized by social interaction deficits, impaired communication skills, restricted interests, and stereotyped patterns of behavior. People with this disability may have difficulty with understanding social cues, breaks in routines, fine motor skills, stress management, and sensitivity to environmental stimuli.
- **Blind and Low Vision:** Few individuals are totally blind; many individuals have some useful vision that can be utilized through the use of adaptive devices. Individuals are considered to be *legally blind* when they meet specific criteria for their vision loss. Someone has *low vision* when they have decreased visual acuity or visual field that cannot be corrected with ordinary eyeglasses, contact lenses, or medical or surgical procedures.
- **Brain Injury:** A brain injury is damage caused by an internal or external trauma to the brain. A brain injury may be caused by inflammation or swelling, bleeding, a blow to the head, or excessive force such as shaking or whiplash; these traumas may result in cognitive, physical, behavioral, and emotional changes.
- **Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing:** The term *deaf* refers to those individuals who are unable to hear well enough to rely on their hearing and use it as a means of processing information. The term *hard of*

hearing refers to those who have some hearing, are able to use it for communication purposes, and who feel reasonably comfortable doing so.

- **Head Injuries:** Some head injuries result in cognitive and behavioral impairments. A head injury may affect one or more of the following areas: information processing, memory, communication, motor skills, and other sensory, physical, and psychosocial abilities.
- **Learning Disability:** LD affects the manner in which individuals acquire, store, organize, retrieve, manipulate, and express information. Areas affected by LD may include reading, written expression, and math. People with learning disabilities may also experience difficulty with organizational skills, time management, or social/interpersonal skills.
- **Mobility Impairments:** Mobility impairments include a broad range of disabilities that affect a person’s independent movement and cause limited mobility. Examples of mobility impairments may include paraplegia, multiple sclerosis, quadriplegia, amputation, cerebral palsy, and arthritis. Depending on the severity of the disability, individuals may have limitations related to stamina, manual dexterity, speech, and ability to stand or sit.
- **Psychiatric:** A psychiatric disability or mental illness is a health condition that impacts an individual’s thinking, feelings, or behavior (or all three) and causes the individual distress and difficulty in functioning. Examples of a psychiatric disability include major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder.
- **Systemic:** Systemic disabilities are medical conditions that affect one or more major body systems. These conditions constitute a disability if they significantly impact one or more major life activities, such as learning. The effects and symptoms of these conditions vary greatly; examples of systemic conditions are cancer, asthma, HIV/AIDS, epilepsy, chronic fatigue syndrome, or diabetes.

Advising Models

To advise students with disabilities regarding overseas education possibilities, both the disability services office and the education abroad office should implement a common advising philosophy. Over the years, the approach to individuals with disabilities has shifted from a medical model to a social justice model. The chart below clarifies the differences between these approaches:

Medical Model	Social Justice Model
Disability is a deficiency/abnormality	Disability is a difference
Being disabled is negative	Being disabled is neutral
Disability resides in the individual	Disability derives from the interaction between the individual and society
The remedy is cure or normalization of the individual	The remedy is a change in the interaction between the individual and society
The agent of remedy is the professional	The agent of remedy is the individual, an advocate, or anyone who affects the interaction

Source: Gill, Carol. 1987. "A New Social Perspective on Disability and Its Implications for Rehabilitation." In *Sociocultural Implications in Treatment Planning in Occupational Therapy*, ed. Florence S. Cromwell. The Haworth Press, Inc. (<http://books.google.com/books?id=CTPSn0LNUPoC&pg=PA49&dq=carol+gill#PPA52,M1>)

The guidelines of the ADA and Section 504 help create a favorable context for the education abroad adviser and the disability services specialist to dialogue about what reasonable modifications can be arranged on an overseas program to enable participation of a more diverse group of students. The social model framework focuses on inclusion, and the individual with a disability is no longer expected to fit within a rigid structure regardless of his or her disability.

Critical to this discussion is the importance of *reasonable* or *appropriate* accommodations. The disability services specialist in discussion with the student can help identify the range of accommodations that a student is likely to need. And in further discussions with the education abroad adviser and the overseas site, it is possible to determine if all or only some of the requested accommodations are possible. It is a joint decision by all parties whether the accommodations available overseas will be sufficient to allow the student to participate in the essential aspects of the program and be able to benefit from the overseas experience.

Tips and Tools for the Adviser

The guidelines below can help create a model for education abroad and disability services specialists to follow in order to provide collaborative and comprehensive advising services for students with disabilities. Institutions will want to adapt these general guidelines to fit with their particular campus administrative and advising structure.

- ✍ Students should be *registered with their disability services office* on campus so that this office can review disability documentation and participate in discussions about accommodations abroad. This ensures that the *education abroad office* is not in the sole position of determining what kinds of accommodations are appropriate for a particular student's disability needs.
- ✍ Education abroad *offices should encourage disability disclosure* so that the student and the adviser can consider disability needs as early in the advising process as possible. Information on a program's health or special requests form can be an *excellent place to encourage* disclosure. Statements encouraging disclosure in a program brochure, a disability inclusion section on the Web site addressing the needs of students with disabilities, and photos in promotional materials and in the education abroad office showing students with diverse disabilities can help those students feel welcomed and safe to disclose their needs. Two examples of institutions and organizations that have information encouraging disclosure are:

Pennsylvania State University

www.international.psu.edu/ea/

Arcadia University, Center for Education Abroad

www.arcadia.edu/abroad/default.aspx?id=6974&terms=students+with+disabilities

- ✍ Inviting students with disabilities who have studied abroad to speak at disability and education abroad advising and information sessions can help potential applicants anticipate the experience they may have and feel empowered to share their disability needs.

- ✍ Although it is important to foster early disclosure, this information should not be used to disqualify an applicant and should not be requested on an application form. A student should be accepted to a program based on the standard program eligibility requirements, and the question of disability accommodation is best pursued after acceptance. Students do sometimes bring up issues related to disability before acceptance, and advisers should not avoid these questions but should be knowledgeable about how to make sure this information is kept separate from the admissions decision.
- ✍ When reviewing a student's application, it can be helpful to keep in mind a student's disability status and any accommodations that have been provided. A student may have had a reduced course load, for example, as part of a disability accommodation, or a student may have had a difficult semester academically before recognizing the need for and receiving appropriate disability accommodations on campus. Clarifying these circumstances with a student during the application review process can be helpful in interpreting the student's application and identifying potential disability accommodation needs overseas.
- ✍ The *disability services* and *education abroad* offices should have a coordinated advising process in place for students with disabilities so that the roles of each office are clear. Contact should also be made with other offices and organizations that might play a role in the student's preparations. Remember that if a student is directly enrolling in a university abroad, that university may also have a disability services office, or the equivalent. The following Web sites provide suggested roles for key offices and organizations potentially involved in the student's education abroad experience:

Michigan State University, Study Abroad

<http://studyabroad.msu.edu/advisers/disabilities.html>

University of Minnesota, Learning Abroad Center

www.umabroad.umn.edu/access/professional/rolesResponsibilities.html

Mobility International USA

www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/bestpractices/

- ✍ Advising materials specifically for students with disabilities should be available at the disability services and education abroad offices. These materials should encourage disclosure, provide students with a recommended process for identifying an education abroad experience and clarify the process for assessing and requesting overseas accommodation possibilities. It is helpful to have these materials available electronically so that students needing the information in alternative formats can have easy access. Two examples of electronic education abroad advising materials that outline key topics to include for students are:

Michigan State University, Study Abroad

<http://studyabroad.msu.edu/accessibility/disabilities.html>

University of Minnesota, Learning Abroad Center

www.umabroad.umn.edu/access/student/index.html

Mobility International USA also offers a useful publication, *Survival Strategies for Going Abroad: A Guide for People with Disabilities*, which institutions can make available in their resource center for students:

www.miusa.org/publications/books/ss

As part of the **Council on International Educational Exchange Knowledge Series**, *Disability: Making Study Abroad Happen for You* is a brochure that provides encouragement and resources to students with disabilities planning to study abroad and is available to read online or to order copies of for display in college-level education abroad and disability services offices:

www.ciee.org/program_resources/knowledge/disability.aspx

- ✍ The education abroad office should conduct an *accessibility audit* of its office to ensure accessibility for students with disabilities. The disability services office will often have information on which campus office can provide an assessment of physical accessibility, such as door handles and openings, space for students in wheelchairs to access print materials, and assist with considering office signage in alternative formats. Advisers should also know who the contact person is if a student requests print materials in alternative formats. The disability services office may have support staff who can accompany a student to the education abroad office to read materials or coordinate electronic transfer of materials to a more user-friendly format.
- ✍ *Education abroad staff* should request training on advising students with disabilities. Advisers may be nervous about working with these students because they are unsure what to do if a blind student enters the office or if a student asks about the possibility of having a “note taker” for overseas class lectures. Organizing a training session on how to assist students with disabilities during the advising process and the kind of typical accommodations provided on a U.S. campus will help advisers feel more confident in their advising skills, gain a better understanding for the kind of accommodations students currently receive, and help create a welcoming environment for students. Conversely, this kind of meeting can be an opportunity for education abroad advisers to share with disability services some of the situations they may have encountered in the past and encourage awareness for the staff in both offices on the particular needs of students with disabilities and education abroad.

The DVD from the **University of Pittsburgh**, *Making It Happen* (www.abroad.pitt.edu/makingithappen/film.html), produced with a grant from the IFSA Foundation and funding from additional sources, includes information on preparing students with disabilities for an overseas experience and includes interviews at overseas locations. This tool is an excellent springboard for a joint training session.

Additional resources that can be utilized for staff training are:

Mobility International USA: *Building Bridges: A Manual on Including People with Disabilities in International Exchange Programs:* www.miusa.org/publications/books/bb_html

Mobility International USA: *Self Assessment on Inclusion of Participants with Disabilities in International Education Programs:* www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/inclusionassessment/

✍ Finally, the education abroad office and the disability services office should clarify in advance how accommodation costs will be addressed. It is recommended that institutions identify a source of funds that can be dedicated to overseas accommodations. One possibility is to clarify to what extent home campus disability services funds for student accommodations can also apply to accommodation costs overseas. This approach allows the disability services office, which is skilled at clarifying appropriate disability accommodations for students on campus, to determine, in consultation with the education abroad office, what kind of costs are reasonable to cover overseas.

Additionally, education abroad offices should establish a source of funds for possible overseas program accommodations. This might include hiring an overseas student to assist a student with a disability with an initial orientation to the new environment, covering some or all of the expenses of an accompanying dedicated companion, or hiring an additional assistant to accompany a faculty-led program and provide additional support. Institutions or organizations with facilities abroad should identify funds to cover the cost of purchasing classroom equipment (such as a projector and screen to display material visually or a wheelchair-accessible desk) or making reasonable structural changes to an overseas program office building, particularly if these changes could also benefit future program participants. It is best to seek further guidance from the general legal counsel of the organization or institution if the question of cost arises.

Planning ahead enables institutions to be prepared and respond strategically rather than be caught by surprise with an individual student need.

Assessing Overseas Accommodation Capacity

When considering overseas options, students should be encouraged to identify their academic, personal, and cultural interests rather than focusing first on accessibility. Identifying an overseas site primarily based on accessibility can limit a student's possibilities since many sites could be potentially accessible, based on the student's particular disability needs and the ability of the overseas site to accommodate those needs. No particular country overseas, length of stay, or type of program can be classified as "the best" for students with disabilities. Programs in countries with minimal formal disability legislation, for example, can have just as much, and sometimes more, flexibility to accommodate a particular disability need. In terms of length of stay, some students do best on a shorter stay while others may find that they benefit most if they can adjust to their new surroundings over time. In some cases students with disabilities may be able to take advantage of the host country's national disability services if they officially enroll for a semester or longer at the local university.

The education abroad adviser may need to explain to an interested student the importance of being flexible and identifying more than one option to maximize that student's possibilities. The earlier a student discloses accommodation needs, the more time there is to explore multiple options and make arrangements in advance. If application deadlines are quickly approaching, a student may need to prioritize his or her program interests so that the education abroad adviser can determine which program or overseas site to contact first. A student should be allowed to apply to a program even if the accommodation possibilities are not yet known. Of course, a student may elect to wait to learn whether an accommodation need can be met before paying an application fee or making other financial commitments.

To determine whether an overseas program can provide the necessary accommodations, it is important that the student consults with his or her disability services specialist and provides the education abroad office with an overview of overseas accommodation needs. Since overseas programs often do not have the range of services that a student may be accustomed to receiving on the U.S. campus, it is important to clarify which accommodations are essential for the student to participate in the program and which accommodations would be helpful but may not be required. It is also important for the host community contacts to understand more fully the student's disability and corresponding accommodation needs so that they can determine what might be possible to provide.

Maintaining confidentiality is a critical aspect of appropriate advising in general and is particularly relevant for students with disabilities studying overseas. It is important to discuss with the student those overseas who will be informed of the student's disability accommodation needs, and to identify with the on-site staff those who will be provided with this information. Critical staff such as the housing coordinator, the overseas director, and faculty who may need to facilitate accommodation requests may be informed, but it is also important to respect the student's right to privacy regarding his or her accommodation needs and to identify thoughtfully who needs to be informed.

Creating an accommodation form that can be reviewed by the education abroad office and sent overseas helps to formalize on-campus procedures and ensures that the accommodation request has been approved by the disability services specialist. As was mentioned earlier, this form may be sent to multiple programs simultaneously so that the student can determine which program is the best match for their accommodation needs. Two examples are:

Michigan State University, Study Abroad

<http://studyabroad.msu.edu/accessibility/accommodation.pdf>

University of Minnesota, Learning Abroad Center

www.umabroad.umn.edu/access/professional/accommodationsRequest.pdf

When sending the accommodation form to a program provider or overseas contact, it is important to emphasize with the program provider or the on-site staff that the form is part of a *dialogue* on accommodating the student on the overseas program. Some overseas staff may be quite open to the request and may have provided accommodations in the past. Many overseas contacts may not have considered disability accommodations previously or may feel overwhelmed by the thought of making accommodations for an individual student. In these cases, the host culture may not typically offer special services to individuals with disabilities or consider the range of disabilities accepted in the United States as needing special accommodations. If there is a cost to providing accommodations or if there is a perception that significant additional staff time will be required, the overseas staff may be reluctant to provide accommodations. As a result, it is essential to encourage students to disclose as early as possible so that there is sufficient time to explore options with the overseas site.

As part of this dialogue, the overseas contact should be encouraged to clarify what accommodations might be possible and what restrictions or additional considerations need to be conveyed to the student. For example, a program might not be able to provide readings in Braille but could identify a reader to assist a blind student with reading assignments and identify course books in advance for the student to transfer to an accessible format prior to departure. Another program contact might be flexible on the deadline for completing classroom assignments but cannot adjust standardized testing dates for final

exams. It is important for the overseas program to clarify specifically where the barriers are and how they have made these distinctions so that the education abroad adviser, the interested student, and the disability services specialist can discuss and research alternative solutions, determine whether the barriers are significant, or whether the accommodations are sufficient for the student to participate in the program. All parties need to be receptive to the possibility that the program may not be a good match for the student and his or her accommodation needs while at the same time also engaging in conversations and researching options to share with overseas partners that might have less disability experience.

To alleviate conflict over which institution will pay and arrange for specific accommodations, it is recommended that disability-related needs be written into formal agreements with overseas partners. Overseas partners should know and expect to receive U.S. students with disabilities. Relating disability to other agreed upon anti-discrimination standards such as religion, race, or sex can provide a foundation for agreement when individual accommodation requests arise. The free downloadable publication, *A Practice of Yes! Working with Overseas Partners to Include Students with Disabilities*, provides suggested language for institutional agreements (**Mobility International USA**, <http://www.miusa.org/publications/books/poy>).

Once a program has been identified, it is important to clarify in writing (or by e-mail) what accommodations will be provided, who the on-site contact person will be, and what, if any, accommodations are not possible. This information should be provided to the student, the disability services specialist, and to the overseas site to ensure that everyone has the same understanding of what will be provided. If additional needs arise once the student is overseas, the overseas program, the education abroad office, and disability services should consult jointly to make an informed assessment about further accommodations.

So that a student can receive accommodation services, it is essential that the student disclose the accommodation needed in a *timely manner prior to* program participation. Education abroad offices should include this reminder in their program materials and on their Web site and recommend how much advance notice a student should provide (depending on the accommodation needs, six months prior to departure, for example). If a student requests accommodations shortly prior to departure or even once on-site, they may find that the overseas program cannot make the accommodation and may need to accept the financial consequences—deferring participation or returning home from the program. While it is unusual for a student to have to leave a program once on site, it can occur and programs are not obligated to provide accommodations without sufficient notice. Whenever possible and reasonable, programs should make every effort to fill requests for accommodations even if they come at a late stage.

Predeparture Materials

Preparing a student for the overseas experience is an important component of all education abroad programs. Having specific information to address the needs of the variety of students who study abroad, including students with disabilities, helps students develop realistic expectations about their upcoming experience and can encourage students who may have been reluctant or not yet considered the benefits of studying overseas to disclose their disability needs.

The amount and kind of information provided to students will vary greatly depending on whether an institution offers its own programs, primarily advises students on programs managed by other organizations, offers faculty-led programs, holds one general predeparture orientation, or organizes

program- or country-specific meetings. The following suggestions, therefore, need to be adapted to each specific institutional context.

- ✍ Include a general statement in all orientation handbooks that encourages students with disabilities to consider education abroad and to disclose accommodation needs well in advance.
- ✍ For specific programs that enroll a large number of students from your institution, do include more detailed information on accommodations available at that particular site. Examples of accessibility information on particular overseas sites can be found at:

IES Abroad, Diversity Resources

www.iesabroad.org/IES/Diversity/diversityResources.html

Michigan State University, Study Abroad

<http://studyabroad.msu.edu/accessibility/index.html>

University of Minnesota, Learning Abroad Center

www.umabroad.umn.edu/access/accessibilityAbroad/index.html

- ✍ Create a Web page or include in your written materials useful resources for students. Mobility International USA (<http://www.miusa.org/ncde>) has information on traveling and studying overseas, including overseas disability offices, free publications, and practical tips for specific disabilities.
- ✍ Interview students with disabilities who have studied abroad and include their tips and impressions on your Web site or invite them to speak at predeparture orientations. Student experiences are also available through various Web resources, including the following:

Council on International Educational Exchange

www.ciee.org/CIEE_initiatives/under_groups/study_abroad/disabilities/stories_success.aspx

University of Pittsburgh Study Abroad Office

www.abroad.pitt.edu/makingithappen.html

University of Minnesota, Learning Abroad Center

www.umabroad.umn.edu/access/student/studentExperiences.html

Mobility International USA

www.miusa.org/ncde/stories

- ✍ Include information in your predeparture materials on resources for mental health support. Building relations with your counseling center on campus and listing their Web site in your materials can help you to facilitate contact between a student overseas and your campus counselors if a mental health situation arises while a student is abroad. Identifying resources that can also be shared with overseas staff can assist them in supporting students overseas. Two recent publications provide helpful guidelines on this topic and can be particularly helpful for overseas staff to receive:

Best Practices in Addressing Mental Health Issues Affecting Education Abroad Participants
<http://www.nafsa.org/mentalhealth>

The Jed Foundation, ULifeline: A Guide for Faculty and Staff
www.jedfoundation.org/assets/Programs/Program_downloads/StudyAbroad_document.pdf

Be certain that students are informed about any international insurance your institution or the program provider offers and whether there are restrictions regarding pre-existing conditions.

Mobility International USA offers a valuable publication on this topic:

www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/arrangingtravel

- ✍ Many students, including students with disabilities, need to bring prescription medication overseas. Your predeparture materials should remind students to consult with their physician about their medication needs while abroad, to bring sufficient medication for their entire stay with them, to keep the medication in the original prescription containers, and to bring a physician's written description, in case a replacement is needed. Students should also keep in mind that it is generally illegal to ship medication overseas and that medications which are allowed in the United States may be illegal in other countries. The following tipsheet can help students prepare for their medication needs overseas:

Mobility International USA

www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/medications

- ✍ For students who will be receiving accommodations overseas, be certain that the student has the name of the overseas contact person who will assist with any disability needs and ask that person to introduce him- or herself to your student to encourage open communication while the student is abroad.

Finally, be certain that the participating student has your contact information and the contact information for his or her U.S. disability services specialist, in case any questions or concerns should arise while the student is abroad.

Providing Overseas Accommodations

Accommodation needs for students with disabilities vary widely. While some accommodations may require significant modifications, such as physical access to a building, many accommodations are neither labor intensive nor expensive. Often students who study abroad require accommodations such as extra time on tests, note-taking assistance, ground floor classes, access to counseling services, or front-row seating in a classroom for lectures.

Although every student's accommodation need is unique and must be considered in light of the overseas site's physical, administrative, and programmatic possibilities, the examples below provide an overview of how an overseas program might be able to meet accommodation requests.

Example 1: Learning Disability Accommodation

A student participating in an exchange program notifies the education abroad office two weeks prior to departure that she requires extended time on tests, lectures available on PowerPoint to be able to review information after class, and assistance with note taking in class. The education abroad adviser has the student submit written verification from the disability services specialist regarding the student's needs. The disability services specialist submits the verification and clarifies that students in U.S. classrooms are often willing to assist with note taking, in case this might be an option to explore with the overseas partner. The adviser faxes the information to the overseas institution and informs the student that the short notice could impact which and whether accommodations are possible. The overseas institution indicates that most of the accommodation requests are possible, but not all instructors have lectures available electronically. The student agrees to be flexible on her course selection and has a successful experience overseas.

Example 2: Systemic Disability Accommodation

A student studying on a language program overseas discloses that he has a sleep disorder and requires flexibility on testing requirements in case he is not able to attend class on that particular day. The program clarifies that final exams cannot be adjusted but individual assignments can be flexible. The student also requests separate housing to ensure having a quiet sleeping environment and agrees to pay the additional cost for a single room. The student arrives at the program site a few days in advance to allow time to acclimate to the new environment and successfully completes the program.

Example 3: Mobility Disability Accommodation

A student who uses a wheelchair inquires about the possibility of studying at a study center overseas. To accommodate the student, the overseas program will need to create ramp access to the center, identify accessible housing, and provide alternative transportation for excursions. The program determines that ramp access would improve the entrance to the center for everyone and is a worthwhile financial investment. Although the program has multiple housing options, only one apartment located in the city center is accessible, and the student agrees to accept this placement. The student is informed that some classes may not be in accessible buildings, and the student clarifies that she is flexible about her course selection. The student is responsible for the cost of transportation from the housing to classes, either using public transportation or a special accessible minivan service. The program is able to identify accessible transportation on all required program excursions and receives some financial assistance from the city's disability services office.

A first step toward assessing the extent to which an overseas program can accommodate students with disabilities is to have students, program leaders, or on-site contacts complete an overseas assessment. In addition to providing information on a program's current accessibility, it can also be used to begin a discussion of what might be possible in the future. A good example:

University of Minnesota, Learning Abroad Center

www.umabroad.umn.edu/access/professional/survey.pdf

Education abroad advisers can also gather helpful information on program accessibility by completing this form when making overseas site visits. Alternatively, scholarships could be provided to students with disabilities and, in return, recipients could complete this form for future students. Sometimes

advisers need to look within the overseas community and not just on the university campus to find disability resources to utilize. National disability organizations can be found through online searches or on the **Mobility International USA** Web site (www.miusa.org/orgsearch).

Accompanying Benefits

When considering accommodation requests for a student with a disability, it is valuable to think beyond the particular student and consider the extended value of any accommodations that might be instituted at a particular site. Adding a temporary or permanent ramp to a building entrance, for example, benefits not only the student in a wheelchair but also individuals accessing the building with a stroller, a student using a cane or temporarily using crutches, or a program participant who might have reoccurring joint stiffness. Identifying counseling services not only benefits a student with depression but also students who might face a sudden family loss while on the program or a student experiencing severe cultural adjustment. Closed-captioning for television is valuable for people who are deaf or hearing impaired and also for any viewer watching television in high noise environments or in a foreign language. In the United States, this broader view of the benefits of accommodations, known as universal design (**NC State University Center for Universal Design**, www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/), was initially applied to architectural design to integrate disability access into overall architectural features rather than, for example, have separate and special access only for individuals with disabilities. The concept of universal design is now widely applied on U.S. campuses to maximize the audience who can benefit from any particular accommodation. Universal design is also a concept being promoted in other regions worldwide, from Japan to Norway to Brazil.

For education abroad programs, the principle of universal design can assist both in identifying the value of providing a requested accommodation and in considering whether to make a permanent change to a program's physical or programmatic structure. Clearly an important part of the consideration for some accommodations is cost. While there are no absolute guidelines on how much expense a program should be required to absorb for a particular student accommodation, there is general agreement that the cost should be reasonable, and most programs will assess whether any costly changes are likely to benefit a larger group of students in the future. In many cases, the overseas program or its sponsoring organization assumes the cost for any accommodation that it agrees to provide and that ensures access to essential aspects of the program.

Rights and Responsibilities: A Guide to National and International Disability-Related Laws for International Exchange Students (**Mobility International USA**, www.miusa.org/publications/books/rr), is a free 125-page publication regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act and how it and other disability civil rights laws protect those participating in international exchange. It also includes information on the right of equal participation in study abroad programs for students with disabilities, international laws and policies related to disability issues, and case studies and stories of how these rights and responsibilities have been put into practice.

Conclusion

As the U.S. campus population continues to diversify and the interest in education abroad grows, education abroad advisers can expect to see a growing range of diverse students studying abroad. The tools and resources in this publication are designed to give education abroad advisers a helpful road map for advising students with disabilities and providing them with the information and tips they will need to have a successful experience abroad.

A number of useful Web links are included throughout this article. The following summary list highlights key general resources for advisers nationwide.

University of Pittsburgh Study Abroad Office

www.abroad.pitt.edu/makingithappen.html

Mobility International USA

www.miusa.org/ncde

NAFSA: Association of International Educators

www.nafsa.org/publications

University of Minnesota, Learning Abroad Center

www.umabroad.umn.edu/access