Ask: We urge members of Congress to cosponsor and pass the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act this year to significantly increase the number and diversity of American students studying abroad, especially to non-traditional locations.

In today’s global society, a U.S. undergraduate education that includes a meaningful study abroad experience is more important than ever. Study abroad gives students the opportunity to engage with other cultures, enhance foreign language skills, and expand international knowledge. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. study abroad participation plummeted 91 percent. While numbers rebounded following the pandemic, with nearly 189,000 U.S. students abroad in the 2021-2022 academic year, participation remains 46 percent below pre-pandemic levels. Increasing access to study abroad during college is critical to ensuring that U.S. students gain the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to succeed in tackling global challenges and navigating a worldwide economy.

The bipartisan, bicameral bill seeks to codify and enhance the State Department’s Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students (IDEAS) program, and formally renaming it as the “Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program.” Inspired by the vision of the late Senator Paul Simon of Illinois and the recommendations of the congressionally-appointed Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, the legislation would advance four national goals:

- One million U.S. college students will study abroad annually for credit;
- Study abroad participants will more closely represent the demographics of the undergraduate population in terms of gender, ethnicity, students with disabilities, income level, and field of study;
- A significantly greater proportion of study abroad will occur in nontraditional destinations outside Western Europe; and
- Higher education institutions will make study abroad a critical component of a quality higher education.

The bill is endorsed by more than 50 U.S. organizations, including NAFSA. For more information, visit: www.nafsa.org/simon

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