



Association for Higher Education Access & Disability

A Study Abroad Plan for Students with a Disability

A Study Abroad Plan is basically a systematic assessment of the support needs of the student while studying abroad. It is a process of gathering information from different sources upon which to base an accurate description of the learning needs of a particular individual. This process is objective and comprehensive and forms the basis for providing the reasonable accommodation for the student, which is a legal obligation. A Study Abroad plan gives the international officer a framework to gain insights into the impact of disability and to appreciate their role in creating a barrier free study abroad environment. The process of assessing the needs of the student depends on a collaborative approach between the sending and host institutions and between different functions in both including the academic function and disability support function.

The Study Abroad Plan should include the following information:

- ✓ The student and the impact of their condition or impairment. It is important to understand the impact of the disability by asking the student about their experience.
- ✓ Consider all aspects of study abroad:
 - Travel needs
 - Accommodation and living needs
 - Academic support needs
 - Library and text/materials requirement
 - Local travel needs
 - Assistive technology needs
 - Disability support needs
 - Medical needs
 - Social and leisure needs
 - Community needs
 - Have a named contact in the receiving institution



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A documented **study abroad support plan** should be negotiated with the receiving institution so that their support needs can be agreed.

Confidentiality in the management of sensitive information is essential. The student has a right to privacy and information about the student needs to be handled with sensitivity and consideration for compliance with the Data Protection legislation. It is not acceptable to share student information without the students consent and then only on a need to know basis. (AHEAD Disclosure Booklet 2013) In short, while it is important that the host institution needs to know that a student requires his/her notes online, he does not need to have a diagnostic report. It is important to get the students written consent so that their information can be passed on to another party. (If this has previously been done by the disability office it does not have to be duplicated here).

For example, Linda is studying languages and is a wheelchair user. She must study engineering abroad as part of her course but will require a physically accessible learning environment, classrooms, lifts, entrances, living accommodation, accessible transport etc. in order for her to take part. She is very worried about this experience as she has never lived away from home before and in the past has often been left out of activities because she cannot get into building or a room.

If you are the institution sending the student with a disability abroad here are some tips:

- ✓ It is important to encourage the student to disclose and to be open about their disability. In your promotional literature actively mention students with disabilities as a target group and invite them to participate. Make links with the disability office in your institution to ensure the message gets to the students with disability. Use case studies



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in your literature about students with a disability. Be clear that disclosure will lead to support.

- ✓ Students with disabilities need to be thinking about study abroad at least six months ahead of other students as they may have to carry out more research to ensure the host institution is inclusive and understands their disability. Don't exclude yourself (in the opportunity to study abroad, to participate in activities), everybody needs support.
- ✓ Encourage the student to use websites such as to get information on the institution they are thinking about going to, they can also research the institution by looking on the website for disability support services. If they cannot find information it may indicate that the institution may not suit their needs. They should be able to find out the contact information for the disability support office.
- ✓ Get in touch with the receiving higher education institution well in advance before the exchange starts.
- ✓ Contact the disability office of the receiving university/university college.
- ✓ Encourage the student to be open and encourage them to tell about your needs, but also your strengths.
- ✓ Document the needs of the student and verify with official medical reports where necessary, so that the disability is taken seriously.
- ✓ Always involve the student and copy in on emails sent to host institution
- ✓ Be clear about funding and who pays for what, how to access additional Erasmus funding Allow in your budget additional efforts for students who need this.
- ✓ Inform students that also part-time studying abroad is possible (special application Erasmus)
- ✓ Listen to the student.
- ✓ Reach out: find a student with a successful experience abroad (and similar needs) to share his/her experiences with Linda.



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If you are the host institution what should you do?

- ✓ Start with a 'yes', Linda can come. After the 'yes', you can think about 'how' to make it possible.
- ✓ Make clear who you should to contact within your institution with questions, for example the engineering department. Have a named contact person. Make clear who the contact is in the institution e.g. the disability office or international office.
- ✓ Build allies, e.g. between disability office and international office.
- ✓ It's important to understand the background of the student, hence ask the sending institution to complete the Study Abroad Support Plan.
- ✓ Provide a buddy to support the student (especially at the start).
- ✓ Ask about the student helps/supports at the home university/university college.
- ✓ Include international students with a disability (if they want) in the existing student support groups.
- ✓ Request information from the sending institution on the support needs of the student and ask for a support plan
- ✓ Make arrangements with student networks to include the student.
- ✓ Inform the faculty at the receiving institution:
 - What does this label mean?
 - What are the individual needs of this student?
 - What can you do as a teacher to answer these needs?
 - Be flexible in the forms of assessment.

Ask the sending institution to complete the study abroad support plan with the student so that you can put supports in place as soon as possible.