



FOUNDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

A Guide for In-Country Teams



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FOUNDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: A GUIDE FOR IN-COUNTRY TEAMS

Diversity Abroad Access for Disabilities Abroad Task Force

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Purpose

Students with disabilities are engaging in international educational experiences in increasing numbers, and this is great news. These students gain access to impactful immersive opportunities that personally, academically and professionally transform them. Equally as important, each disabled student's unique perspective enriches the experiences of other students and local communities.

This document rests on the belief that support and access for students with disabilities enhances the experience for all international education stakeholders and that it is a shared responsibility to make sure students with disabilities have inclusive experiences abroad. Perhaps more than any other single group, in-country teams play an important role in building an inclusive program.

Differing laws, cultural practices and communication

methods can make it difficult for in-country partners and US based universities to create partnerships with consistent and effective methods of accessibility. This guide serves as a starting point to address this difficulty.

The purpose of this document is to give context and resources for in-country international education staff on the subject of U.S. study abroad students with disabilities. This document is not exhaustive. It cannot be, because each individual program will need to remain flexible, communicate among its stakeholders, and decide on its own assessment goals. Instead, the information provided will include terms, methods and tools which on-site staff can use right now as well as the information necessary to begin the unique process of planning ahead for contingencies. The resources outlined in this document will begin with an overview of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), including the accommodations or services that students often receive on their home campuses. We want to emphasize that the ADA is a starting point, not a goal. Inclusion is an ongoing process. To that end, the guide will also serve as an

educational tool that in-country staff can utilize as a self assessment focusing on three specific areas: flexibility, communication, and program development and assessment.

This resource was created by Diversity Abroad's Access for Disabilities Abroad Task Force. The Task Force is comprised of international education and diversity professionals from around the country who have a vested interest in supporting the initiatives of Diversity Abroad. The group includes faculty members, education abroad directors and advisors, student success officers and university relations managers.

ADA on US College Campuses

In order to explain where our students are coming from and what they are accustomed to, we want to lay out standards and best practices related to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These are the standards that we are held to in the U.S., and we recognize that your country may have similar or divergent standards. We advise students that they should expect differences, but for many U.S. students with disabilities these standards have been key to their success. Current interpretation of the law suggests that the ADA accompanies U.S. students on study abroad programs. Therefore, it is important for in-country staff to understand the types of support U.S. based international education staff may be helping our students seek when they study abroad. Below we will offer an overview of ADA to define what has helped students with disabilities be successful on their home campuses.

According to Title II and Title III of the ADA, public and private colleges and universities must provide equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. All public or private schools that receive federal funding are required under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to make their programs accessible to students with disabilities. Enforcement is provided under The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the United States Department of Education.

All programs of postsecondary institutions, including extracurricular activities, must be accessible to students with disabilities. Institutions are required to provide auxiliary aids and services when required by a student with a disability. Schools can do this in several ways as illustrated in the Auxiliary Aids & Services table below. Many U.S. students with disabilities receive one or more of the aids and services outlined below. All programs and services must be provided in an integrated setting. In some cases, architectural access may be the only way to make a program accessible. Modifications of policies and practices are not required when it would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity.

Auxiliary Aids & Services

Hearing Loss	Interpreters, note takers, closed captioning decoders, open and closed captioning, computer-aided transcription services, written materials, telephone handset amplifiers, assistive listening devices/systems, telecommunication devices for deaf persons, etc.
Vision Impairment	Taped texts, readers, audio recordings, television enlargers, talking calculators, electronic readers, braille calculators, printers or typewriters, brailled materials, large print materials, access to school facilities for service animals
Mobility Impairment	Specialized gym equipment, architectural access to buildings including residential facilities, funds for mobility assistance
Learning/ Cognitive	Extra time on exams, distraction-reduced exam location, note sharers, exam rescheduling when more than one exam is scheduled on the same day, early course registration, access to a calculator, access to a computer
Physical & Mental Health	Counseling, medication, accessible housing & facilities, accessible healthcare facilities, modifications to program activities, flexibility with attendance when due to medical symptoms, ability to make up work missed when due to medical symptoms

Provisions of the ADA that most directly apply to study abroad offices and international partners include:

- Students are not required to inform a postsecondary institution of their disability unless they are requesting disability services. Students can request these services at any time.
- Postsecondary schools may require students to follow reasonable procedures to request an academic adjustment. Students are responsible for knowing those procedures.
- Schools may require students to provide documentation of a current need for accommodations. Students may be required to pay for a professional evaluation. The school may also conduct its own evaluation of needs at its own expense.
- Appropriate academic adjustments must be determined based on a student's disability and individual needs.
- In providing an academic adjustment, postsecondary schools are not required to lower or substantially modify essential requirements. Accommodations may affect how a test is taken, but not what it measures.
- Postsecondary schools do not have to make adjustments that would fundamentally alter the nature of a service, program, or activity, or that would result in an undue financial or administrative burden.
- Schools may not charge students for required academic adjustments nor may they charge students with disabilities more for participating in programs.
- Postsecondary schools do not have to provide personal attendants, individually prescribed devices, readers for personal use or study, or other devices or services of a personal nature, such as tutoring and typing.
- Postsecondary schools must have someone such as a Section 504 Coordinator, ADA Coordinator, or Disability Services Coordinator; who coordinates the school's compliance with Section 504, Title II, or both laws.
- Schools must have a grievance procedure with steps where students can raise concerns if they feel that their needs are not being met.
- Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the school's grievance procedures or wish to pursue an alternative to using those procedures, may file a complaint against the school with OCR or in a court.

Self Assessment

After developing a general understanding of the role of U.S. colleges and universities in supporting and accommodating students with disabilities, it may be helpful to assess your own institution's practices and capabilities when it comes to approaching this important work. The following are three key categories to explore as they relate to supporting students with disabilities participating in your programs.

Flexibility

It is imperative to have some degree of flexibility when working with students with diverse needs. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to working with students with disabilities, as each student's needs will vary. To gauge your institution's current level of flexibility, consider the following questions:

- Are our policies and processes inclusive of students with various disabilities? For example:
 - ▶ Would our application and/or language placement test be accessible to a blind student?
 - ▶ Is our on-site orientation held in an accessible location? If not, do we have an alternative solution for students who cannot access the facility?
- Do we currently have the resources available (financial, staffing, technology, etc.) to be able to be flexible in supporting students with differing needs?
- What factors related to our programs are completely inflexible, hard-stops?
- Have we had a student with a disability attend the program in the past? If so, what were the biggest hurdles to overcome? Did we make long-term changes as a result?
- Have we considered alternative or back up plans for lodging, excursions, etc.?

Communication

Effective communication is key when it comes to accommodating students with disabilities. There are numerous stakeholders who all play a significant role in students' international experiences, and they must be on the same page in order for students with disabilities to maximize their potential abroad. Open communication can not only aid in the process of providing accommodations for students, but can also help to appropriately set incoming students' expectations about the host institution's accessibility. To gauge the effectiveness of your current communication processes, consider the following questions:

- Are we sharing important information about the accessibility of our programs early enough in the process for students to make informed decisions about participation?
- Is our process for working with students with disabilities clearly outlined and understood by pertinent staff on our campus?
- Are we making sure we share information across all stakeholders on our programs while maintaining student confidentiality as appropriate?
- Do we have a clear process to communicate on this subject with our U.S. partners?
- Are we making sure that we ask questions in language and with a tone that is inclusive?
- Are students with disabilities represented in our marketing materials, financial guidelines, health and safety guidelines, and application materials?
- When is the first time and in what way can students disclose a disability? Do we have the capability to take necessary action based on the communication that happens?

Program Development & Assessment

When developing a new program or course, or assessing a current one, it is important to evaluate the accessibility to students with disabilities. When considering your current processes for program development and assessment, consider the following questions:

- When developing new programs, are we utilizing [universal design](#) principles?
- Have we evaluated our current policies through an inclusive lens? Are our current policies helping or hindering students with diverse abilities?
- Are we gathering and/or assessing feedback from student participants about the inclusivity of our services? If so, what do we do with that information?
- Are the specific courses we offer inclusive of students with disabilities? For example:
 - ▶ Do we offer courses that involve off-site learning such as field trips, museum tours, company visits, etc.?
 - ▶ Are the requirements of our courses clearly outlined in the syllabus and/or program materials?
- Are we participating in regular professional development and training on this topic?

Conclusion

As previously stated, this resource is not exhaustive, but we hope that it provides a starting point for assessing and improving services available to study abroad students with disabilities. We hope it also provides you with an understanding of the resources and support many U.S. students are accustomed to on their home campuses prior to studying abroad. There are some additional web resources below for those of you who wish to seek further information to better equip yourself to continue this work on your campus. We would also like to invite you as Diversity Abroad members to keep this conversation going by sharing your best practices, biggest challenges, and asking your burning questions related to this topic via [Diversity Abroad's Online Community Forums](#).

The Community Forums are a place for Diversity Abroad members to interact directly with each other to discuss diversity and inclusion in global education within the context of their professional spaces. Members are invited to post questions and share promising practices that contributes to our collective capacity to advance diversity and inclusive excellence in global education. We can learn a great deal from the varied experiences and expertise of our colleagues in the field and hope to provide a space where we can engage in meaningful conversation and collaboration with the objective of supporting study abroad students with disabilities.

WEB RESOURCES

[Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities](#)

Department of Education Office of Civil Rights

[What are a public or private college-university's responsibilities to students with disabilities?](#)

The ADA National Network

[The ADA, Section 504 & Postsecondary Education](#)

Pacer's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment

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