

Preparing Globally Educated Americans

GLOBAL CHALLENGES REQUIRE MORE AMERICANS TO STUDY ABROAD

The challenges we face as a nation today are undeniably global in nature. We can no longer afford to be complacent about our lack of knowledge of the world. We cannot expect to be able to defend our nation against enemies we do not understand or to build friendships and promote peace in regions of the world if we cannot communicate in their languages or understand their cultures. One of the most effective ways to overcome this deficit and ensure that we can successfully address the nation's international challenges is to encourage the next generation of Americans to study abroad.

What our nation needs today is leadership at the highest level to commit to and invest in ensuring that many more students have the opportunity to learn necessary global skills through quality study abroad. We need to greatly expand the talent pool of young Americans graduating with study abroad experiences that prepare them to become effective diplomats, intelligence analysts, and international businesspeople.

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A BLUEPRINT FOR INCREASING STUDY ABROAD

In 2007, both houses of Congress introduced the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act to establish a national study abroad program that will inspire students and universities alike to expand their horizons through study abroad. In ten years time, through the establishment of the Simon Foundation, one million students, demographically representative of the diversity present on our college campuses, will study abroad annually on quality programs in diverse regions of the world.

This legislation is inspired by the vision of the late Senator Paul Simon and draws from the

recommendations of the bipartisan Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, which called for the creation of such a national program to dramatically increase and diversify the number of Americans studying abroad. The Commission was appointed by Congress and the Administration in 2004, following a report issued by NAFSA that brought attention to this issue of American global incompetence and called for a national initiative to expand the international education of American college students.

WHY STUDY ABROAD?

Students who live and learn in countries and cultures other than their own gain important global competencies and cross-cultural sensitivities that enable them to acclimate in a global climate of constant change. Through their experiences abroad, students also hone essential foreign-language skills through cultural immersion unavailable in their campus classrooms.

Foreign policy leaders continually rate exchanges as one of our nation's most valuable public diplomacy tools. A public opinion poll commissioned by NAFSA found that more than ninety percent of Americans believe it is important to prepare future generations for a global society and that more than three-quarters of Americans believe that students should study abroad during college to gain valuable international knowledge.

Yet, despite all of this, the data show us that only one percent of U.S. college students study abroad each year. Of those students, few are minorities and most travel to Western Europe. This small pool of students hardly even begins to scratch the surface of the breadth and depth of global knowledge that we will need as a nation to exercise responsible global leadership, and to remain prosperous and secure.

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WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

American students today need to be educated in a manner congruent with the way the world is turning. The opportunity to study abroad cannot and should not be a luxury reserved only for advantaged students. Producing successive generations of students who have had these experiences will do more than anything else to enable the United States to hear the world, to see the world, to know the world in ways that will alert us to emerging trends and threats, and help us understand how to deal with them effectively. These are skills our nation so desperately needs.

With the goal of significantly increasing and diversifying access to study abroad for U.S. students, the Simon Foundation will dramatically enhance our ability to face global situations by ensuring that future generations possess adequate global knowledge and foreign language capabilities.



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