

Study Abroad

Serving Deaf & Hard of Hearing Students

Studying abroad broaden students' horizons with exposure to other cultures and languages. This exposure may increase employability in today's global marketplace. Like their hearing peers, students who are deaf or hard of hearing are seeking out these opportunities to expand their marketable skills.



Are Accommodations Required?

As a service, program or activity sponsored by a college, a study abroad program falls within the mandates of both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Case law and OCR (Office of Civil Rights) decisions are vague, however. Factors that influence decisions center on:

- Where the program originates – Is the sponsoring entity a U.S. or foreign institution or program?
- The program's purpose – Is it required for graduation or is it an extracurricular activity sponsored by an outside entity?
- Who requires it - If the student is required to apply to a foreign institution, who is requiring it – the U.S. institution or the out-of-country institution?

Although recent ADA Amendments provide no clarification about whether the ADA and Section 504 apply to programs taking place outside of the U.S., institutions that administer study abroad programs can make decisions and accommodations based on the presumption that these laws apply.

Getting Started

Planning early provides time to address concerns, figure out details, and secure funding for a win-win situation. There are presently no best practices for planning accommodations abroad. Looking at how accommodations are determined at the home institution offer some guidance about how accommodations can be determined abroad.

Working together, the student, disability office, and the study abroad department can determine:

- What will the service provider's contract include? Should travel time, meals, and transportation be compensated? Will the provider be paid hourly or flat fee?
- Who is responsible for providing assistive listening devices that work outside the U.S.?
- Will a team of providers be needed?
- How will after-hours or social accommodations be handled and who takes care of this?

From Theory to Practice

- Deaf and hard of hearing students have already toured several countries as part of study abroad programs. Accommodations were handled differently in each situation: local interpreting resources, available technology, and the courses themselves were primary considerations. These institutions took a creative approach to accommodations:
- A team of university interpreters was sent to South Africa because of the technical nature of course materials and the lack of local interpreting resources
- One university interpreter traveled to Iceland and contracted with a local interpreter there
- An institution contracted with a team of local interpreters for providing on-site accommodations
- A speech-to-text provider was dispatched abroad from the university's home area

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