Geographical Science Study Abroad

Enhancing the Geographical Sciences Major and Honors Programs of the Department of Geographical Sciences, University of Maryland

Study abroad is an important addition to traditional education in today’s globalized world. Our daily lives are constantly affected by what people are doing across the globe and vice-versa. More than ever we need to contribute to empowering our students to become global citizens. Through the University Study Abroad Office, students already have opportunities to spend a year, a semester, or a few weeks in short-term study abroad courses.

As geographers, we want and must do more!

The Vision

The Department of Geographical Sciences will provide our undergraduate students with the tools to understand the modern world and empower them to become truly “global” citizens by offering them opportunities to learn through the experience of being outside their own culture, in a place substantially different from the place where they live. The Department of Geographical Sciences will transform the short term Study Aboard concept and adapt it to become a standard part of the education of our geography majors. We will build a unique model of geographical sciences education with a capstone course for the majority of our majors, and all our Honors students.

Our goals are to:

- Place a strong emphasis on learning outside of a traditional classroom setting, by linking our on-campus geography program, undergraduate research and internships to study abroad programs, which will be used as the basis for undergraduates’ honors theses and capstone courses offered by the Department of Geographical Sciences.
- Increase the overall number of geography students in the study abroad programs offered by the Department of Geographical Sciences related to their academic studies.
- Build sound financial support for geography majors to enable them to engage in a new field dimension and international understanding of geographical science.
- Offer about ten scholarships/grants, open to Juniors majoring in geography, to participate in study abroad programs offered by the Department of Geographical Sciences.

Box: Past experience - model for the future:
Short term experiential learning abroad: Investigating the future of small islands - Case study: The island of Ilovik in the Adriatic Sea
- In the spring of 2011 four undergraduate geography students prepared for a study abroad research program in Croatia
- In the summer of 2011 the students participated in the study/research abroad with a faculty member native to Croatia
Each student received a grant from the Department of Geographical Sciences to offset living expenses abroad.

**Tangible outcomes of the program:**
- two students graduated with honors in 2012
- one student continued her graduate studies at the Department
- two presentations were given at the Mid-Atlantic Division AAG in 2012 (one received the first prize for student paper competition)
- two posters were presented at the AAG meeting in New York, 2012
- an article with the results from the research has been accepted and will be printed in an international journal in 2013

**Strategic Plan**

Given that the Department of Geographical Sciences already has several short term Study Abroad offerings, our strategy is to build on what is in place, enhancing and evolving the current programs and linking them to our curriculum. The closer the linkage the more useful the experience will be for the Department and the students.

Therefore, we are building a study abroad program consisting of:

- on-campus 3 credit course, followed by
- off-campus 3 credit study abroad, followed by
- 3 to 6 credit supervised research project in the semester after completing international off-campus experience based on data collected abroad and continued on campus research.

To offset the high cost of studying abroad for our majors we are building the Global Studies Fund:

- The Department has started the fund with seed money that has already enabled several students to participate in the successful research program in Croatia
- Continue to build the endowment that would allow the Department of Geographical Sciences to fulfill its obligation to empower students to become truly “global” citizens by tying successful geographical experience abroad with our on-campus curriculum

We will take the advantage of:

- A significant amount of research in different parts of the world done by the Faculty of the Department of Geographical Sciences
- The fact that our Faculty members are native to several countries on four continents
- Our Faculty with research activities that can be drawn upon for the geography program abroad in different regions of the world
- The uniqueness of the opportunity; none of our peer departments in other universities have dedicated study abroad funding, nor do they make it a capstone experience.

**Box:** Our Faculty has been widely engaged in projects throughout the world; some examples are:
- Congo Basin Forest Monitoring Using Satellites for the Central Africa Regional Project for the Environment;
The Effects of Nature Tourism as a Development Strategy on Poverty and Inequality: The Cases of Namibia and Mozambique;

Forest land cover and land use change in the Far East of the Northern Eurasia under the combined drivers of climate and socio-economic transformation;

Impacts of Land Use on Negev Rangelands.

The Challenge

The Department of Geographical Sciences’ strategic plan calls for a radical change in the Short Term Study Abroad program from a minor activity to an integral part of the geography major and honors program.

The overriding problem faced by our students who otherwise would participate in short term Study Abroad programs is the cost, and the University has none or very limited resources that can be used to defray these costs.

Box: Typical cost of a Short Term Study Abroad program at the University of Maryland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In country expenses:</th>
<th>$2000 – $2500 including accommodation, meals, in-country transportation, activities and entry fees, insurance and personal expenses including meals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel to country from USA:</td>
<td>$1000 or more depending on the destination and a season of travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Fees:</td>
<td>$250 – 500 (Study Abroad program, and department fees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor’s expenses:</td>
<td>$800-1000 per student (including accommodation and other in country expenses, travel from the USA, and instructional fee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total per student:</td>
<td>$3,920 – 5,000 or more depending on a county destination</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The challenge, therefore, is to develop a substantial endowment that can provide significant scholarships/grants to reduce the cost of studying abroad to geography majors.

We call upon donors that believe that travel abroad in an academic context for students can be truly transformational, to help us build this truly unique program of the Department of Geographical Sciences!

Department of Geographical Sciences
BE Global Enhanced Studies Fund
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742, USA
Grenada 2011

Croatia 2011, Students conducting interviews on the island of Ilovik

Presenting results from research on Ilovik at the AAG meeting, New York 2012
Croatia SA Program: From War and Communism to the EU

Southern Caribbean SA Program: Sailing though the Caribbean waters

Southern Caribbean SA Program: Working on the ship