

Advising Students with Disabilities on Studying Abroad: A Practical Guide

Students who have disabilities can and do go abroad! As an advisor, it's important to be supportive, inclusive, encouraging, and realistic. Providing students with resources can help them determine what location and program is the best for them. See below for handy tips for advising students.

Terminology

Knowing what words to use (or not to use) is key to having successful dialogues.

Avoid:

- referring to people without disability as “normal.”
- using terms as a limitation, e.g., saying ‘uses a wheelchair’ instead of ‘wheelchair bound.’
- saying handicapped, physically challenge, special needs, special education.
- labeling a person by his or her disability.

Key Words

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – U.S. law that prohibits discrimination based on a disability.

Accommodation – Assistance to ensure a person with a disability can equal access.

Advising Advice

- Encourage students to disclose.
- Encourage students to start planning early – it will take time to research programs & countries and gather documentation, e.g., for medications, service animals, etc.
- Give the student autonomy. Provide the student with information but give the power to decide to the student. He/she will have the best understanding of his/her capabilities but may not know the legal or cultural obstacles of other countries.
- Provide student with resources to do research on his/her destination and program options.
- Be honest, but positive about the accessibility of the destination and the type of accommodations that might or not might be available.
- Connect student with your institution's student accessibility services office, Mobility International, and returned students.

Resources for advisors:

- National Disability Authority: <http://nda.ie/Publications/Attitudes/Appropriate-Terms-to-Use-about-Disability>
- SAFETI Clearing House: www.globaled.us/safeti/program_administration/support_for_participants_with_disabilities.asp
- Your institution's student accessibility services office.

Resources to share with students:

- Mobility International USA: www.miusa.org
- U.S. Dept. of State: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-with-special-considerations/traveling-with-disabilities.html>
- Service animals abroad: www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/10steps
- Questions students should ask themselves: <http://disability.illinois.edu/academic-support/accommodations/study-abroad#3e>

Example Advising Situations

Student with a wheelchair

- Ask the student where he/she are interested in going and say that it may take a lot of research and planning.
- Be honest about locations that generally may not have elevators, ramps, or may not have smooth ground, e.g., cobblestone sidewalks.
- Have the student think about manual wheelchairs vs. electric (different voltages in other countries).
- Research the host country to learn disability/accommodation laws.
- Research host country culture surrounding visible disabilities.
- Research airline procedures.
- Connect student the with Mobility international and your student accessibility services office.

Student with a service animal

- Ask the student where he/she is interested in going and say that it will take a lot of research and planning to take a service animal abroad and to bring it back to the USA.
- Topics to cover in an advising appointment
 - Start planning and gathering documentation a year in advance.
 - Student needs to contact host country embassy to learn entry policies, required documentation, quarantine laws, and vaccination laws.
 - Research service animal associations of the host country and get in contact with them.
 - Consider getting a pet passport – the host country embassy should indicate if one is required.
 - Getting health and rabies certificate from a veterinarian.
 - Taking a letter from the student's doctor that explains the reasons for needing a service animal.
 - Research the entry requirements to bring the service animal back into the USA.
- More information: www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/10steps

Student that receives classroom accommodation for a learning disability

- Encourage all students to self-disclose. This could be during pre-departure orientation, in advising handouts, and/or in the online presence of your office.
- Let the student know that depending on the location and program type, some accommodations might not be available or available in the same way as the home institution.
- Work with the host program to see what accommodations can be provided and what documentation is needed.
- Work with student accessibility services office to gather documents needed for host program.

Student who receives treatment for a mental health concern

- Encourage the student to speak with his/her doctor before going abroad and make a plan for continuing treatment abroad.
- Work with the host program to get connected with a doctor and resources in-country.
- Review international insurance policy for what is and is not covered relating to mental health and see if additional insurance is necessary.

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