



Barriers to study abroad for US students

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The main barrier to study abroad is cost, and statistics reveal that minority groups are still disadvantaged in terms of taking advantage of study abroad opportunities. For example, while 13.3 per cent of students enrolled in postsecondary courses in the US in 2019-2020 were African American or Black, they represented just 5.5 per cent of those studying abroad, and while Hispanic and Latino students represented 20.3 per cent of US postsecondary enrolment, they represented just 10.6 per cent of US study abroad students. In comparison, Caucasian students represented 54.3 per cent of all US postsecondary enrolment and 70.0 per cent of study abroad students in 2019-20.

Nevertheless, over the past decade, the diversity of students enrolling abroad has increased. While most of the study abroad students in 2014-15 were white (71.6%), the proportion who identified as racial and ethnic minorities increased from 17 per cent in 2005-2006 to 28.4 per cent in 2015-16. The number of students studying abroad who report having a disability has also increased, rising from 2.6 per cent in 2006-2007 to 8.8 per cent in 2015-16. While organizations directly addressing needs of these groups may be lacking, individual universities may have initiatives geared towards this purpose.

First-generation higher education students are also underrepresented among overseas enrolments with fewer than ten per cent of them studying abroad, this is partly due to their parents' lack of knowledge and experience of study abroad opportunities, and counsellors and faculty have been urged to demystify the process and encourage first-generation students to take advantage of study abroad opportunities.

Other barriers include worries about curricula differences and a mismatch in academic calendars and course durations, poor language skills, the ties of family and friends, or simply a lack of confidence in plunging solo into an extended stay in another country and culture.

Sources:

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