

A post-COVID look at Study Abroad: Sustainability and the Global Experience  
Working Group Final Report  
September 2021

## 1. Summary of work

Our working group on Sustainability and the Global Experience met virtually three times for a total of 9 hours this summer. The group consisted of 5 directors of International Programs (see list below) from ACS member colleges. We all appreciated the luxury of time to spend on free flowing discussion about sustainability and study abroad. Obvious connections exist such as reducing the number of flights and miles traveled in order to reduce one's ecological footprint. However, there are many other less obvious, but no less important, connections. If our goal in education abroad is to help students to integrate and better understand other cultures and ways of life, then it makes sense to rely on local experts and resources in all fields but especially on topics like land use, water use, farming, and spiritual aspects of the environment, etc. In addition, we value study abroad programs that explicitly focus on environmental issues, but even programs with a different focus such as art history or politics can be more sustainable in how they are planned. In other words, we expect sustainability to be embedded in program content and/or program planning.

Our first meeting focused on reviewing any sustainability practices already in use at our campuses, a discussion of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and a time to brainstorm about our goals, process and final products. Our next meeting focused on developing usable items for our individual campuses and for the ACS member institutions at large. These include a general statement on commitment to sustainable practices in education abroad that can be adopted or adapted for use on campus, a resource list, and a list of practices and questions that should be considered when working with providers, partners, or with our own faculty-led programs. The third and final meeting focused on listing action plans for our own campuses going forward, further development of a resource list, and a discussion of hosting a workshop on sustainable practices in study abroad for ACS campuses.

Overall, we felt that the working group was highly useful for both considering our individual campus sustainability goals, sharing information, and developing materials that can be used to further sustainable initiatives both on our own programs abroad and with others in the field. International Education as a field is looking more carefully at our impact on the planet and this working group provided a timely and important moment to consider this as we move forward.

## 2. Education Abroad Professional Resources

- a. NAFSA
  - i. [Sustainability in Study Abroad](#) (from 2009, requires member log-in)
  - ii. [Sustainability Member Interest Group \(MIG\)](#)
  - iii. [Regenerating Study Abroad](#) blog post
- b. Forum on Education Abroad
  - i. [Forum resources on UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)
  - ii. [Advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through Education Abroad](#)

- iii. [Greening Your Education Abroad Experience](#) flyer from Penn State

### 3. Provider/Partner Information

Our group discussed how we could best identify partners and third-party providers that upheld the values of sustainability and local connections while paying close attention to the ecological footprint of study abroad programs. Instead of providing names of organizations and partners, we prefer to provide a list of priorities, questions and characteristics that we should consider when making decisions about partners or in developing our own programs. The following is a sample list of considerations to guide that process:

#### Prioritize the Local

- Embedding location in the course content. Use place as a guiding principle.
- Rely on local experts
- Focus on local language where applicable
- Applied experiences are very important and useful
- Seek out opportunities to use reciprocity
- Use local texts and materials (broadly defined) where possible
- Tie the content to local or regional issues in the US. Are there ways to embed comparative elements (readings, site visits, etc.)?

#### Reduce Ecological Footprint

- Suitable and sustainable accommodations
- Sources food locally
- Being mindful of transportation and its environmental impact (e.g. if using plane travel, keep the number of stops to a minimum)
- In the proposal process, focusing on the sustainability issues, transportation, listing of sustainable goals for a trip (for faculty-led programs, embed such questions in the application)
- Set up standards for the review committees
- Develop a pre-departure module that includes considerations of sustainable issues (impact of travel, carbon footprint, changing your behaviors as a traveler, etc.)

### 4. Scholarly Resources (from Dr. Lori Hartmann, Centre College)

- a. Climate Action Network for International Educators ([CAN-IE - Home](#))
- b. Dvorak, A. M., Christiansen, L. D., Fischer, N. L., & Underhill, J. B. (2011). A necessary partnership: Study abroad and sustainability in higher education. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 21(1), 143-166.
- c. Redden, Elizabeth, "International educators begin to confront the climate crisis" in *Inside Higher Ed* (12/19/19).

- d. Rexisen, Richard J. (2013). The impact of study abroad on the development of pro-environmental attitudes. *The International Journal of Sustainability Education*, 8.
- e. Shields, Robin. (2019). The Sustainability of International Education: Student Mobility and Global Climate Change. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 594-602.
- f. Shields, Robin (2020). Greener Mobility and Exchange Webinar (youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQ\\_fsP-t8-o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQ_fsP-t8-o))
- g. Tarrant, M. A., Rubin, D., & Stoner, L. (2015). The effects of studying abroad and studying sustainability On Students' Global Perspectives. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 26(1), 68-82.
- h. "Move Over, Sustainable Travel. Regenerative Travel Has Arrived (New York Times, 8/27/20.

## 5. Campus Action plans

- Birmingham Southern College will use several of the options listed above and will additionally
  - incorporate readings and other texts focusing on the environmental crisis so that students have access to information to gain awareness of the global environmental crisis
  - serve as a resource and promoter of SDGs and sustainability in working with faculty on program design
  - use remote learning opportunities focused on SDGS in collaborative courses with partners abroad
  - development program assessments that focus on SDGs
- Centenary College will or has already begun to
  - revive consortial agreements with a group of Methodist universities that incorporate SDGs
  - develop campus workshops with faculty and staff expertise to highlight SDGs
  - develop a "badge" system to designate courses that involve learning about SDGs
- Centre College will or has already begun to
  - promote SDGs through posters and other media
  - developed and is about to launch a study away semester program in Lake Tahoe that combines topics related to nature and science and has a sustainability and wellness focus
  - incorporated ideas about sustainable travel into pre-departure meetings and on material inviting faculty to propose new abroad courses
- Davidson College will or has already begun to
  - work with providers to determine their level of commitment to sustainable practices and student learning on sustainability topics
  - incorporate sustainability topics into pre-departure information
  - change the proposal for faculty-led programs to include information on sustainable practices

- University of Richmond will or has already begun to
  - incorporate sustainability principles into pre-departure materials and presentations
  - revise the proposal forms for faculty-led programs to include questions about sustainable practices and to use this in reviewing/approving proposals (this will likely be broadened to include sustainability issues in preliminary planning discussions with faculty and staff leaders)
  - develop UR programs with a curriculum that focuses on sustainability or SDGs
  - develop joint programming with colleagues who work on sustainability on our campus
  - launch student incentives (with heavy input from students) for choosing sustainable practices while abroad.

## 6. Participants

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