

10 Things Advisors Should Know when Supporting Students with Disabilities

ADA Key Concepts

Adapted from the Americans with Disabilities Act and other sources to apply in the context of study abroad.

- **Reasonable Accommodation:** any modification or adjustment to a program that will enable an eligible participant with a disability/medical condition to participate or to complete essential component of the program.
- **Standard of eligibility:** program requirements must be the same for all students applying to a program (e.g., cumulative GPR/GPA, course prerequisites, and good academic and disciplinary standing).
- **Auxiliary vs. personal aids:** a campus Disability Services office facilitate a wide range of academic accommodations for enrolled students. For an illustration, please visit <http://disability.tamu.edu/services>.
- Among the services include provision of “auxiliary aids,” which are services or devices that enable a participant with a disability/medical condition to have an equal opportunity. Provision of personal aids; however, are the responsibility of the students which include personal attendants, hearing aids, wheelchairs, glasses, and so forth.
- **Undue hardship:** an accommodation or adjustment that places a significant financial expense on the institution/program provider. In the event of undue hardship, institution may share the expense with other entities, conduct a cost analysis, and/or explore alternatives that will achieve the same goals.
- **Equal Access:** provision of equitable access among participants to essential components of the program which include, but are not limited to, lodging, required excursions, group meals, group transportation, classroom space, and course materials.

- **Fundamental Alterations:** a modification or adjustment that significantly alters the essential goals of the program (e.g., the option to opt out of a language course due to a disability/medical condition on a language immersion program).

Promotion

1. Show what's possible. Be sure to include outreach and promotion to students with all levels of abilities. Use descriptive program language to clearly outline required activities (no surprises). Include language encouraging students with disabilities to meet with an advisor to discuss their individual needs.

Advising

2. Do your homework. Ask questions of the student to understand and address their needs before jumping forward to programs, benefits, etc. It is important to become familiar with available Institutional/national resources/support, both through the home institution and host institution. Do an accessibility audit of your potential sites (available resources include Univeristy of Minnoesta <http://umabroad.umn.edu/professionals/accessabroad/>; Mobility International USA <http://www.miusa.org/>) Outline the process for students on your website to set expectations (sample from Texas A&M University https://studyabroadportal.tamu.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=PublicDocuments.View&File_ID=31068)

3. Build a relationship with the advisee. It is important to have a frank conversation with students about their needs. You don't want to assume you know what a student with a disability can/cannot do! You shouldn't feel uncomfortable asking *relevant* questions about someone's disability. Students may have already done some research on their own, or be familiar with additional resources; be sure to build on this information.

Program Selection & Application

4. Choosing a program will vary with every student. Because of the variety of programs available, and the diverse needs of students, it is impossible to create a comprehensive list of programs available. It is recommend to build a list of accommodations that each of your partners can and cannot accommodate (ex/ School X can accommodate students with visual

impairments, but cannot accommodate a student in a wheelchair). In most cases, it will still be necessary to contact an individual program regarding an individual student's needs.

5. Research resources through the program or institution. Throughout the application process, work with the host institution to identify any resources that would be available to the student at the host institution or host country. Some schools may be able to connect students with local support offices prior to their arrival to ensure advanced contact and preparation.

6. Provide application support and resources, when necessary. Students may require assistance to complete your institutional application or the host institutions application. Connect with your campus disability services office to inquire about necessary adaptive technology. Work with the host institution to modify application process/materials, as necessary. Seek to make all resources/program information accessible, including program websites.

7. Establish a timeline with the student and the program. Depending on the type of accommodations necessary, significant time may be required. Whenever possible, begin making inquiries up to a year in advance. You may run into roadblocks or delays regarding accessibility at the host institution— set internal deadlines for final collection of information and decision-making. It may be necessary to pursue different avenues, so you do not want to wait too long.

Pre-Departure Planning

8. Assess appropriate accommodation needs (preferred vs. necessary) in collaboration with the student and his/her home institution's disability services office. **Review the program schedule** with the student to shape informed, realistic expectations about host country. This may include program structure, available resources, cultural climate of individuals with disabilities, and its level of accessibility. Discuss program requirements and alternative activities/excursions (if applicable), engage the student's input on alternative options and comfort level.

When reviewing the program, accessibility needs to consider include: transportation, lodging, course materials, meals, medical services, out-of-the classroom activities, and pace. Furthermore, assess whether or not additional assistance is needed on the day of departure, in the airport, and upon return.

9. Verify available resources to create an accommodation plan. Potential constituents to consult include the student's home institution's disability services office, state vocational rehabilitation agency, sponsoring program provider/host institution (if applicable), national organization committed to access in study abroad in the U.S. (e.g., Mobility International USA), as well as disability service organizations/providers in the host country.

Note: some countries might not have laws similar to the American with Disabilities Act; therefore, the advisor might need to advocate differently for the student's needs (e.g., solicit ways in which the host country can help to ensure the student is safe and able to participate in this rewarding opportunity, as opposed focusing on legal obligations).

10. Confirm the accommodation plan in collaboration with the student, sponsoring program provider/host institution (if applicable), and study abroad office. Furthermore, identify contact(s) in the event of an emergency or an accommodation service is no longer available.

Expect the best, prepare for all possibilities/contingencies.

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