



VIRTUAL ADVISING TOOLKIT



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ABOUT THE GUIDE AND AUTHORS

This guide was produced by a subgroup of the 2020-2021 Education Abroad - Student Support & Advising Diversity Abroad Task Force. The Task Force is a collection of global education and diversity professionals who provide critical guidance and support to Diversity Abroad initiatives.

The resources in this collection provide a practical guide to engage with and advise students, giving special attention to virtual advising spaces and virtual programming, which have become more prevalent due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of this guide is to provide advisors with resources that aim to make the virtual advising and event space more inclusive and equitable for students who hold marginalized identities.

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Introduction

Welcome! This toolkit is a collection of resources and ideas intended to be utilized and adapted by advisors, administrators, on-site staff, and other members of global education programs. With an intersectional approach and a lens that considers the multiple dimensions of students' identities, this toolkit highlights some best practices for addressing and navigating accessibility, equity, and inclusion in the virtual space.

The guide is conveniently divided into four sections, each with a wealth of tips and information for advisors:

1. *Tools for Advising in a Virtual Environment* offers strategies for scheduling and hosting virtual meetings, providing digital resources, creating virtual offices, and planning virtual study abroad fairs and events.
2. *Considerations for Virtual Engagement with Students* addresses communication agreements, creating equitable virtual spaces, and being mindful of meeting students where they are.
3. *Advising for Virtual Programs* goes over all of the ins and outs of virtual education abroad program offerings and guidelines for advising students throughout the arc of virtual programming.
4. Finally, the *Accessibility to Technology* section provides a range of practical guidance for making virtual environments more accessible to students.

A group of international education practitioners who are part of Diversity Abroad's Education Abroad Student Support and Advising Task Force developed this resource guide as a collective effort to tackle some of the major barriers to equity in virtual global education programming. We hope these resources will be beneficial to a variety of professionals working to support students in virtual global education settings.

TOOLS FOR ADVISING IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

Scheduling

There are many different scheduling platforms one can use for scheduling virtual meetings with students. Some examples include Calendly, Youcanbookme, and Acuity Scheduling. These platforms allow you to start a free individual account 'or a paid institutional account, which include more features. Most integrate with your calendar to provide up-to-date information to students on your availability. Here are some important things to consider when using scheduling platforms:

- Provide students with guidelines on what a virtual advising appointment will entail, technology requirements, and expectations for what they will need or should prepare. See the [University of California - Irvine Study Abroad Center's guidelines](#) as an example.

- Send students questions ahead of time to get information that will allow you to customize the advising appointment. Ex: When do you plan to study abroad? Are there particular locations you are considering? What questions or concerns do you have?
- Consider what questions you are asking. Are you making any assumptions or asking them to disclose information they may not wish to? Are you allowing them to indicate their pronouns? Right from the start you start setting the tone and the environment that students can expect when meeting with you or engaging with your office.
- Make it clear how this information will be used. If you are asking them to disclose certain identities, this should be optional. Assure them that this information will not affect their application status or decision and explain that the information is used to better support them and provide them with relevant resources.
- Consider automatically connecting them to relevant resources. For example, if they check a box to indicate holding a particular identity, direct them to a place on your organization's website with relevant resources.
- Consider the hours, time zone, and length of time you are offering for advising meeting slots to help mitigate screen fatigue for students. Making sure you know who your audience is and where/when they are is essential.

Meeting platforms

There are many different platforms available for conducting individual or group meetings. Some common platforms among institutions include Zoom, Google Meet, Webex, Handshake, and Microsoft Teams. When selecting a platform, it's advisable to first investigate what platforms other departments or offices on your campus may be using (career services, admissions, student success, academic advisors, etc.). The more familiar your students are with a platform, the more likely they are to engage with you and feel comfortable in the advising setting you create.

It's also important to consider the type of communication that your students may prefer. Some students prefer drop-in advising, some prefer group meetings, and some may want 1:1 meetings; the key is to identify the channel or platform that works for your office and the groups of students you're advising.

While students may prefer or be more willing to communicate on a videoconference platform, this may not be the case for other stakeholders your office works with. When communicating with parents or families, more traditional communication platforms (i.e., phone, email) may be more appropriate.

Best practices for setting up a Zoom meeting or event:

- Set expectations for recording any meetings or events before and during the meeting, if applicable. Before the meeting, let attendees know during the registration process by including a statement or checkbox, such as: “By registering for and/or attending this event, I agree to the event being recorded and shared online by *X University* for future educational and promotional purposes.” At the start of the meeting, remind attendees that it will be recorded so they are aware and have the option to leave if they are not comfortable. Explain how the recording will be disseminated, if applicable.
- Give the attendees the option to turn their video on or off.
- Utilize features such as the whiteboard, polling, or breakout rooms to create more interaction among attendees. These features can be set up ahead of time.
- Consider your security settings. It is recommended to have your meeting be password protected and/or use a Single Sign-On (SSO) with an institutional account/email to prohibit unaffiliated users from joining. Enabling the waiting room or lobby feature will also allow you to control who can join the meeting to prevent unknown attendees.

Providing digital resources

When advising or supporting students from a primarily remote or hybrid setting, it’s also important to consider how your organization is providing resources. When students are unable to visit an office or attend an event in person, resources should be made available in a digital format so that students can still access them. There are many different ways to provide digital resources; below are some strategies and guidelines to consider when planning how to share information with your students.

- **Utilize social media platforms.** Sharing information through social media can be effective when sending timely reminders or highlighting stories of past study abroad experiences. Student representation is important on social media; featuring stories of study abroad alumni or students currently abroad can be a great way to elevate different voices and provide prospective students with different perspectives. When highlighting students on social media, consider the following:

- » Instagram takeovers can be an effective way for students to get a sense of what day-to-day life could be like abroad. Make sure to provide guidelines for students doing takeovers to ensure appropriate and relevant content is shared.
- » Consider having student ambassadors or alumni make short videos where they talk about their experience being X identity in Y location. This can be an effective way to highlight voices and perspectives from different identities. However, be cautious in how this information is presented to avoid tokenization of students and the identities they hold.
- **Use QR codes** in presentations, flyers, and social media to easily direct students to resources or Zoom rooms for drop-in advising with staff or peer advisors.
- **If your office works with provider organizations, consider how you can partner with them** to offer additional resources or opportunities for engagement with students. This could include pre-recorded or live sessions with US-based reps or on-site staff that discuss specific programs or locations, provide onsite tours, and highlight different cultural activities (e.g., host university tour, cooking demonstration, virtual dance performance, etc.). Collaborating with on-site partners can be a great way to virtually engage with local communities, provide students with helpful information as they consider their study abroad plans, and maintain essential partnerships.
- **Consider ways in which resources could be more digestible for students.** For example, creating short, 30- to 60-second videos that focus on specific aspects of daily/campus life or the study abroad journey (e.g., finances, application process, academic planning) can be an engaging method of providing information to students that could be shared through various platforms.
- **There are many platforms that may be appropriate for housing resources,** outside of an institutional website. Some platforms that institutions have used include:
 - » [Prezi](#): products for designing interactive presentations, videos, and resources
 - » [Canvas](#): learning management platform that can host modules of information and assess student knowledge or understanding
 - » [Sked Social](#): tool for organizing and scheduling content to appear in Instagram accounts
 - » [FlipGrid](#): platform for creating short, video-based discussions and sharing
 - » [Twitch](#): platform for streaming creative content
- **Ensure that any resources hosted digitally are accessible to all students.** Refer to the [Accessibility to Technology](#) considerations or section below for details.

Virtual offices

Virtual offices offer a forum for interacting with students and other stakeholders and for providing resources within a virtual setting. A virtual office is a creative, visible space using several platforms where visitors can click on different objects, watch videos, listen to clips, schedule appointments, and see announcements. It is a way for people to get information in one place that can link to outside resources on your website and elsewhere. Consider including instructions to schedule virtual meetings, diversity resources, upcoming events, and announcements. You can also include audio, video clips, images, and avatars to personalize your space. Get your virtual office seen by including a link in your email address and organization's website. View [Appendix A](#) for examples of how some U.S. universities and provider organizations have set up their virtual offices. Here are some how-to guides:

- Create a virtual office with Google Slides. Chapman University provides a [step-by-step guide](#). Individual staff can create their own office that links to a main office page and/or resource slide.
- To make your virtual office more personable and show your allyship or identities, using Bitmoji guides has been a fun and interactive way for students to feel more connected. [Reference this guide](#) and [watch this YouTube video](#) on interactive Bitmoji classroom for more information.

Virtual study abroad fairs and events

There are many potential benefits to hosting a virtual study abroad fair. These can include reaching students who are not able to attend in person due to scheduling, providing the information and recordings on your website after the event, and connecting with overseas partners who cannot travel to an in-person fair. However, you miss the opportunity to connect with students who drop by as they pass by an in-person fair on campus. For that reason, advanced marketing and making it easy for students to connect with your fair are crucial in this space.

Virtual Fair Platforms: Investigate what platforms other departments or offices on your campus may be using (i.e., career services, admissions, student success, academic advisors). The more familiar your students are with a platform, the more potential you have for success. Below are some common platforms that have been used by institutions and provider organizations:

- [Zoom](#) is a videoconferencing platform that has several features for hosting virtual meetings and webinars. [In a recent report](#) that summarizes lessons learned from attending many virtual events throughout the fall of 2020, provider organization ISA by Worldstrides found that Zoom is the “preferred program for virtual meetings, walk-in advising and information

sessions” but shouldn’t be the only platform used for virtual events (2020, p. 1). Below are some additional tips when considering using Zoom as a platform:

- » If hosting an event with various Zoom sessions, ask the presenters (i.e., providers, faculty leaders) to create their own Zoom link with custom registration to capture student data. This will involve less work for the study abroad office to coordinate all the session details.
- » Consider using the breakout rooms feature to host multiple sessions at one time or allow students to ask questions in smaller groups. Refer to this resource for more information: [How to use the updated Zoom: choose-your-own breakout room](#).
- [Luna Fairs](#): This virtual event platform is specifically for connecting providers with universities and their students. At the moment this platform is free for universities as long as international education organizations are not charged for attending the fair.
- [Handshake](#): A familiar choice for many career services offices, this platform allows for short advising slots and info sessions.
- [Prezi Next](#): Create interactive videos with analytics for easy follow up. Utilize pictures and videos from previous programs or virtual experiences for promotion.
- [Pathable](#): Virtual platforms like this one can be used to facilitate study abroad fairs and other events. There are features that allow users to customize their event experience and interact with each other and presenters during the session. Note that using this platform does come with a cost.
- [Wisr](#): This networking platform can be used to connect alumni and current students virtually.
- [Google Meet](#) is a free virtual meeting platform if your organization already uses the Google suite.

Marketing: Cross-promotion to your campus partners—such as academic advisors, faculty, the career center, academic departments, and student affairs—is key to getting the word out for virtual events. Map out your marketing strategy with your team at least two weeks prior to the event. Methods of promotion can include:

- *Email:* Share an email template with your campus contacts and department listservs with event details to promote to their students via email or e-newsletters.
 - » Send a reminder email the day of the fair to all registrants (ideally 1-2 hours before) with some technology tips.
 - » Send post-fair emails to follow up and include instructions on next steps and to encourage booking advising appointments.

- *Social media:* Instagram is currently one of the most effective platforms for universities and organizations to use to connect with students. Below are some tips for using this platform and social media platforms in general:
 - » Use all features including stories, live Q&A, and timeline posts.
 - » Make sure to include links to registration and the campus events calendar in any social media posts.
 - » Student-driven content is key: utilize your student workers and student ambassadors (if you have them) to share content on their Instagram if they are willing to, or have them do an Instagram takeover on your account for greater peer-to-peer interaction.
 - » Once you have created posts, tag other offices/departments you collaborate with (e.g., student life, housing, academic departments, club organizations, career services, Greek life, etc.) and ask them to reshare content and use your hashtags. Reciprocate and share your campus partners' social media for their events too!
 - » Share your social media accounts at the end of all info sessions and presentations to gain more followers.
- *Live promotion:* Coordinate with faculty to join their virtual classes or other departments to be a part of other campus-wide events. Offer to create a short video to promote your events that you can record first on Zoom or another platform and have the faculty share the video in their classes.

Structure/planning: Virtual platforms give you more options on the time and length of events. ISA by WorldStrides (2020) found that events that take place over 1 or 2 days have been more successful than stretching it out over several weeks. With longer events, students can get overwhelmed and don't know where to start. There is also the "Zoom fatigue" factor that many students are experiencing these days. The following list contains tips for how to structure and plan your virtual event. Many of these tips draw from ISA by WorldStrides' evaluation of virtual study abroad fairs in Fall 2020.

- Include a live virtual event on the first day as a starting point to give an overview of the fair and show students how to navigate the event and activities. Or record a video in advance and include it on your fair website for students to reference.
- Shorter, time-bound events on specific topics have been the most successful for fairs and information sessions. Students want to know what they are committing to, that it will align with their schedule, and that it will be relevant to them.
- Shorter, individual advising meetings can be more effective than open-ended, walk-in advising sessions.

- Organizing content by academic area has been very successful. It can be easier for students to know where to start and what is relevant to them. It increases buy-in from colleges and academic advisors and can allow for more targeted marketing.
- Have a mix of pre-recorded, live, and static resources to accommodate different ways to access information.
- Share recordings through different methods (via email, post on social media, embed on your website, etc.).
- Having a registration process is important for getting commitment from attendees. The registration process can be simple, but be sure to use the information gathered to send reminders and follow up emails. Then you can also evaluate after your event who attended vs. who initially registered, and analyze the demographics of those attendees.

For more ideas on approaches to virtual outreach, engagement, and event planning, [this article provides additional tips and strategies](#). View [Appendix B](#) for examples of how some U.S. universities have set up their virtual study abroad fairs.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) considerations: When creating fairs in a virtual space, it is important to consider the needs of your audience and the students you are targeting. Ask yourself these questions as you plan your fair:

- What types of sessions will you offer? What topics will you focus on?
- Who are you inviting to present? Whose voices are being amplified?
 - » How can on-site staff be involved?
 - » How can other campus partners be involved to address important topics (financial aid and scholarships, accessibility, DEI office, etc.)?
 - » How can you amplify student voices (ex: alumni panels discussing their experiences holding a certain identity)?
- Who are you inviting to attend?
- How are different communication and learning styles being considered?
- How will students with low bandwidth/internet speeds or no access to Wi-Fi be able to participate?
- How will students be able to access information before, during, and after the event(s)?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT WITH STUDENTS

With the major shift to virtual classes and programs globally, many of the typical norms higher education professionals practice have been transformed and now require intentional reflection on previously assumed methods of engaging students. Relationships and community-building are still key when interfacing with students virtually. However, these interactions look very different as global circumstances have drastically changed. This section provides a thorough perspective on aspects of virtual engagement to consider when communicating with students.

Establish communication agreements

- Before a virtual meeting, event, or other type of student engagement:
 - » Send pre-readings, agendas, and clear connection instructions prior to advising meetings in order to prepare the advisee for the appointment.
 - » Give students the option and agency to choose how they would like to connect for advising meetings.
 - » Organize experiential activities before or after virtual meetings or events. For example, you can have all participants (including you as facilitator) go on a walk in their location and take some pictures, cook a dish, visit a park or a local trail or garden, watch the same TED talk, do a yoga/workout class online, etc. Doing similar activities offline can encourage participation and is a great way to build community in a virtual environment.
- During the virtual meeting, event, or other type of student engagement:
 - » Make it clear that it's always an option to turn off video.
 - » Set clear rules/boundaries for each meeting, and lay out steps that will be taken if any discriminatory behavior, bullying, etc. occurs in the virtual space. These rules can include:
 - * Set ground rules for using the chat feature within a meeting platform. For example, discourage side conversations that will distract students from the main conversation and outline what is appropriate/inappropriate to post.
 - * Ask students to keep their mics muted unless they are speaking
 - * Encourage participants to look whoever is speaking in the eye
 - * Focus on the meeting/conversation and do not get distracted by websites, social media, e-mail, or phone
 - * Acknowledge and address cyberbullying and harassment and clarify that it will not be tolerated
 - * Adhering to confidentiality and avoiding gossip outside of meetings
 - * Listening/speaking from one's own experience, not passing judgment on what others say

- * Ask participants to add their own ground rules or participation agreements. This gives participants more agency in creating an inclusive virtual space.
- After the virtual meeting, event, or other type of student engagement:
 - » Set up text groups or Instagram message groups to continue engagement and conversations following the main advising session or event
 - » Include local partners where possible in events and virtual advising. This can help students make connections during the pre-departure process and know how to direct questions.

Create equitable virtual spaces

- Model the articulation of pronouns without making students feel forced to share their pronouns
 - » Add pronouns to your name on Zoom by logging into your Zoom account, clicking on Preferences > Profile and then adding your pronouns after your last name in parentheses (ex: Jane Doe (she/her)).
 - » Introduce yourself using your pronouns. This encourages students to do the same when they introduce themselves.
- Explore using affinity groups for advising students on education abroad opportunities
 - » Affinity groups can give students the space and opportunity to discuss unique challenges faced by people in specific identity groups in global education.
 - » Affinity groups can serve students with spaces for advocacy and education before, during, and after abroad (and/or virtual abroad) experiences.
 - » Affinity groups can also work on specific tasks or common goals like reviewing policies and procedures, creating content for websites or social media, or making recommendations for increased equity on global education programs.
- Know campus resources/reporting options
 - » Be able to provide contact and other relevant information about Title IX issues.
 - » Know what platform or mechanism your university uses to allow students to report discrimination, harassment, and other forms of violence.
 - » Meet the members of your campus's LGBTQ+ center, student groups that uplift the voices of marginalized people such as the Black Student Union, the sexual harassment resource center, the office of disabilities, and other relevant people and groups.
- Practice an embodiment exercise such as grounding/centering/breathing/meditation
 - » [This blog shares a few examples](#) of things you could try. There are many internet resources for mindfulness exercises in a virtual environment.

- Focus on community-building in a virtual world
 - » Similar to thinking about affinity groups, think about creative ways to connect students across class years and programs and with alumni groups.
 - » Allow space for fun and sharing personal experiences and stories in virtual advising spaces.
 - » Create spaces for mentorship for students who are struggling to build community or want guidance around social dynamics in the virtual space.

Be mindful of meeting students where they are

- Schedule and plan for reflection time and personal check-ins with students to ensure that they have time to speak with you. Have a set list of 2-3 questions that you would want to ask students during these check-ins. Keep in mind that maintaining professional boundaries is still important. Below are some examples of check-in questions:
 - » How can I best support you in this time?
 - » What are some strategies you do for self-care? If you don't have any, let's brainstorm some together.
 - » What is one next action step that you want to take away from our conversation?
- Many students' circumstances have changed with the move to virtual formats. This could be a variety of situations:
 - » For students living in close quarters with family:
 - * Offer to brainstorm with the student to help them think of ways to find their own space. Here are some examples:
 - * A student might be sharing a bedroom with their siblings and they do not have their own desk area. They are able to carve out their space by finding another structure or folding table and putting up a clean bedsheet as a divider during program time.
 - * The student can put on their university colors and tshirt when they are in class, so their family knows they are in "on campus" mode.
 - » For students who are financially supporting family, have increased work hours, or who are caring for family, such as elderly members, children, or siblings:
 - * If you have the flexibility and the means, make time to be available outside of business hours so that students can reach you either by phone, email, learning platform, or social media.
 - * Offer to provide any resources or connect them with staff from the financial aid office, and support them in the process of filling out any paperwork.
 - * Consider asynchronous learning if you are teaching classes, holding info sessions, or other events. This would allow these students to still participate and be engaged with the content on their own time.

- * Acknowledge that students with dependents are having to increase their support for their children's education or childcare.
- * An example question for a check-in with the student: What would be the best time and way for us to communicate?
- » For students who may be experiencing housing instability:
 - * Many of these students often face homelessness due to family conflict or abuse. If that is the case, offer any campus counseling and/or mental health resources available to them.
 - * Partner with colleagues at your institution's housing and residential life office to see if there is additional assistance or affordable housing options on or off campus.
 - * Check to see if your institution's dining services or other campus organizations have a food bank available for students.
 - * Direct and connect students with a financial aid counselor at your institution to help them navigate finances on a tight or limited budget. Through the financial aid office, students may be able to obtain waivers for some applications or fees.
- Students may have concerns surrounding their identity, and it is imperative to consider all aspects of a student's identity in any virtual engagement. These identities may include first-generation college students, students with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ students, racial or ethnic minority students, students with a religious affiliation, and more. It is important to acknowledge that these identities are interconnected and often overlap, which can sometimes amplify certain stressors and challenges.
 - » For first-generation college students:
 - * First-generation college students can find it difficult to feel a sense of belonging on campus, and being remote can exacerbate that disconnect. Consider proactive outreach strategies that let students know about different virtual activities and advising resources your office offers and the different ways you can be available to them.
 - * There may also be a digital divide for these students as they may have less access to fast internet connections or sufficient technology for engaging remotely. Provide multiple ways for students to connect with you, including by phone.
 - * Be flexible with application deadlines and other requirements, especially if students need to work or pick up extra shifts to supplement household earnings during an economic crisis.
 - » For students with disabilities: Please refer to our section on [Accessibility to Technology](#) for strategies on supporting students with different physical or learning needs.

- » For students who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community:
 - * Show visual indication that you are affirming by using background images, a website statement, your signature, or pre-meeting emails. In your pre-meeting emails, you may include a short statement such as, “Please let me know if there is anything you would like for me to know about you before we meet virtually.”
 - * Offer students the opportunity to let you know their pronouns. Make this optional, as some students may not feel ready or comfortable to identifying themselves publicly.
 - * If a student has been open with you about their identity, check in with them to see if they are open with their family/community or if their family is supportive of them. This will let you know how to best communicate with the student during meetings without outing them, in the event they are living with family.
- » For racial or ethnic minority students:
 - * Stay up to date on current events, news, or frequent discrimination occurring nationally and globally.
 - * Connect with the staff at your institution’s multicultural center or diversity office to learn about their resources, support groups, student organizations, initiatives, or events for students. Attend at least 1-2 events per term if appropriate.
 - * Review your events, sessions, or curriculum to see if there are any “blind spots” in the content. For example, if you notice that all your guest speakers are from the same racial or ethnic background, consider inviting more diverse voices.
- » For students with a religious affiliation: Ask students to let you know any times or days of worship, prayer, traditions, or religious holidays so that you can be aware of their schedule and availability. Keep these dates in mind as you plan events such as info sessions, orientations, pre-departure sessions, or study abroad fairs.

ADVISING FOR VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

Advising in the world of virtual programming is a different process, just as with everything else during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adjusting to different types of programs, how to apply and pay for them, how they can benefit students, and the proper etiquette for such programs are all in the hands of advisors. While a virtual program can't replace an in-person experience abroad, it's important to acknowledge that they are not inferior and they have their own unique benefits. Advisors should not belittle or demean virtual programming as inferior to in-person opportunities when discussing options with students. There are a lot of options available for students, including great opportunities to engage with institutions, businesses, and organizations that would normally not be this accessible. In this sense, virtual programs can be a great way to expose students who would otherwise not engage with global learning or study abroad, whether it be due to interest, access, or other factors. This can create a passion for other cultures in students that can potentially lead them to explore other experiences abroad in the future. This section contains some guidelines on advising students who are considering or participating in virtual programming.

Advising students on virtual program offerings. These are many different types of virtual programs and each can have a distinct focus. This is a growing area of the field and will likely continue to evolve. The information below outlines some of the most common types of programs to date and the various components of virtual programming that are important for advisors to understand when considering what type of program may be the best fit for a student.

- Types of programs:
 - » Virtual Internships are opportunities to support businesses, NGOs, and other institutions. These vary from being specific to a certain subject area to more flexible programs geared towards students trying to figure out their career path.
 - » Virtual language classes are very common. They vary dramatically in quality and content. These can take place in formal settings through institutions of higher education or via social media platforms like Tik Tok. Either way, the right language course can be a great way to immerse students not just in language learning, but also in engaging with another culture.
 - » Virtual service learning projects vary in quality and should be vetted carefully. The balance between impact on the community and students participating should be balanced and not skewed in either direction. Students' work should be vetted carefully to assure that it is not "busy" work created to fill time, but rather based on actual needs in communities.
 - » Virtual exchange programs partner students from different institutions and countries. Students attend classes and other online events together. This gives them the opportunity to work alongside students from other cultures.

- Components of virtual programs:
 - » Webinars on a range of topics are ubiquitous right now and vary in quality. Diversity Abroad's community discussions, Via TRM presentations on topics around study abroad, and universities offering one-time presentations on research are some examples. There are a lot of free options offered by reputable institutions which should be the first option advisors suggest. Paid options should be vetted carefully to assure that the value-add is there for students.
 - » Virtual tours of cultural sites, museums, and other attractions can be found online through local tourism boards and other resources.
 - * Ex: [Virtual reality Machu Picchu tour](#)
 - * Ex: [Louvre Online](#)
 - » Cultural immersion experiences can include dance lessons, cooking classes, and other cultural activities.
 - » Guest speakers are great because they can be done in house or through a provider. A professor at a university could do a webinar on an international topic they are an expert on. There is also the possibility to bring in providers from different countries to present on different topics.
 - » Virtual team building. There are providers that specialize in virtual team building activities. These are meant to harness a positive group dynamic among a cohort of students or staff.
 - » Online panels, similarly to guest speakers, could be done in house or through a provider. These are shorter in length and are meant to be free standing.
- Program length: Programs range from one-time and short-term (2-5 sessions over a week) programs to entire semesters. Some programs can be as long as normal study abroad programs. Others can be a one-hour session or a one-week track. This allows for students with varying degrees of time availability to participate.
- Program cost:
 - » Many free opportunities exist, particularly in the form of webinars, virtual tours, and pre-recorded sessions.
 - » Cost should be equitable and attainable for students. Institutions should consider whether virtual programming is covered by tuition costs or should be considered as part of the program fee. Can a student's scholarship, grants, or financial aid be applied to a virtual program?
 - » Institutions should be well versed in emphasizing the value of virtual programming and engaging with an international audience. Advisors should explain the value of having local connections included in the program design when students are analyzing the cost of a program. The value of, and cost associated with, engaging virtually should not be minimized.

- Audience:
 - » Programs can include students in cohorts from just one institution or a collection of institutions, depending on preference.
 - » This can create opportunities for students to participate from all over the world, not just US-based students, which creates more of an intercultural exchange.
 - » For universities with an online school, this could be a unique opportunity to engage with students who did not feel connected to study abroad before or were prevented from participating due to logistics or barriers to access.

Advising students on the unique qualities of virtual programs and the necessary skills for success. There are several aspects of virtual programs that make them a unique and often quite different experiences than an in-person program for students. The points below outline several important things that can be helpful for advisors to highlight as they are working with students who are considering participating in a virtual program.

- First and foremost, while virtual programs are different, they should not be discounted as an inferior experience. There are many benefits to participating in a virtual program and students can gain valuable skills through these experiences.
- These programs, similar to online learning in general, require a higher level of independence and proactiveness on the part of students. Time management and managing one's schedule are key skills for students to be successful in these types of programs.
- There are certain rules of etiquette with online programming that students should strive to follow. When advising on these, always use empathy as your guide. Not all students will be able to abide by these norms, but these are a roadmap toward the best possible engagement. There needs to be a balance between accessibility and etiquette.
 - » Choose a time for the session that works for varying time zones and locations.
 - » Make sure you are dedicating your attention to the session (taking into consideration working from home), bringing your whole self to the dedicated time for the program, even from the at-home workspace.
 - » Having video on helps engagement and creates an environment of collaboration. Students should make sure to have an appropriate background, which can be as simple as a sheet or a blank wall. Advisors can also demonstrate to students how to use virtual backgrounds, change names and avatar pictures, etc. When changing your name, avoid nicknames and include pronouns.
 - » Students should make sure to dress as they would for an in-person program (ex: if an internship program, still wear work attire).
 - » Students should be aware of how to mute themselves when not speaking. Advisors can also coach students on how to assess the situation in smaller groups where having the mic on the entire time might be appropriate.

- » Be prepared for interruptions in the background, but understand boundaries. For example, many virtual calls will have pets, children, or other family members occasionally walking by, but it may be an issue if it becomes distracting for others or the student. Other things like street noise and lighting are a bit out of one's control.
- » Understand tech needs ahead of time (connection speeds, devices, etc.). Institutions can provide resources if they are proactive in understanding students' access to such technologies.
 - * A best practice is to specify in program advertising exactly what equipment, software programs, and internet speed will be necessary. If the institution has a web page on accessibility considerations for programming, this is a great place to share this information.
 - * Refer to [Arizona State's program brochure](#) as an example; a "special considerations" tab includes details on technical considerations for participating in the program.
 - * To provide more cultural "immersion," many programs can benefit from using high-definition video, Go-Pro tours streamed live, and high-resolution images/maps. Note that these will require an additional amount of bandwidth that students may not have with their home internet access.
- » Ask more questions and intentionally engage more than you might normally.
 - * If converting a traditionally in-person program to a virtual format, it will need to be at a slower pace to allow for interactivity and space to ask questions, and to avoid the fatigue of engaging through a screen. When on a virtual platform, like Zoom, seeming interested takes more effort. In the absence of body languages there is much more focus on words and sustained eye contact, which is exhausting. It's best to incorporate frequent breaks away from screens.
- » Prepare for interruptions, or inadvertently having multiple people start talking, as these are hard to manage within a virtual setting.
 - * To avoid this, consider using a particular format for discussion (like flipped classrooms, round-table sharing) or using a signal (such as raising a hand in Zoom, commenting in a chat, or a different cue) to let moderators know someone has a question or comment.
- Establish appropriate and realistic expectations of outcomes.
 - » It's important to set expectations ahead of time and acknowledge that it's not the same as a traditional in-person study abroad experience. Students realize this will be very different from being present in another culture, but be sure to communicate how this program is still intercultural, and when and how that cultural immersion will happen. Below are some examples of questions to consider and address when setting expectations with students:

- * When will interactions with individuals from that culture happen, and how can they make it meaningful?
- * How do you provide the opportunity for students to imagine themselves being prepared to travel to that location in person one day?
- * How can you help students reflect on what skills they have learned and articulate how the experience will help them achieve their future goals? For example: “working with this group on my virtual internship helped me feel confident that I can work overseas.”

Supporting students during and after virtual programming. Checking with students during and after their virtual program is crucial for providing holistic student support, especially when students may not have regular face-time with program staff on a daily basis. Both advisors and on-site program staff should make efforts to check in with students throughout the program experience. In addition to offering drop-in advising hours, making a point to have a scheduled advising session that is at least 30 minutes can help determine how to best support the student for the duration of the program. Scheduling an advising appointment after the program concludes can also help the end of a student’s experience feel less jarring, and provide a more significant send-off or sense of closure, in lieu of a traditional end-of-program farewell at an airport. Below are some additional considerations for staff for providing support during and after the virtual program experience.

- Schedule a mid-program check-in as part of the design
 - » The mid-point check-in is a great time to go over goals and re-work some of them depending on how far they have come in achieve these goals.
 - » It is totally fine if program goals have changed a lot, since these types of programs are new, and likely very new to students!
 - » Culture shock is still possible, to an extent, so evaluate for signs.
- Send a post-experience survey
 - » Ask questions that assess how comfortable they felt throughout the program. Did they feel threatened at any point or experience perceived harassment or discrimination?
 - » Be clear about next steps depending on the university’s reporting process of any harassment or discrimination; online will usually follow the same rules as an in-person incident.
 - » Have an option to make the survey anonymous, for sensitive topics.
- Reach out to them afterward individually to check in
 - » Provide follow-up resources and check in later to ask if they were helpful or not.
 - » Culture shock can sometimes still be a factor when going through virtual programs or internships, especially if there is a language component, communication with many individuals or groups, and/or large differences in time management styles.

- » Replicate face-to-face contact by engaging in talk about their personal life and home life, and by focusing on what they learned about themselves, their growth, and resilience.
- Consider scheduling shared appointments with an on-site advisor if possible, and also having separate check-ins with students. This way, students can choose to potentially open up about challenging circumstances with the advisor they are most comfortable with. Be sure to coordinate advising appointments and office hours with on-site coordinators if they are not involved in the actual appointments.
 - » When students email on-site staff, ask them to cc you so accountability is higher to resolve any issues.
- Address incidents of microaggressions and harassment seriously. Microaggressions and incidents of harassment can still occur during a virtual program and should not be treated lightly, even when the victim of such incidents did not experience them in person. To ensure that students know they can come to you and it will be handled, explicitly state during orientation that virtual microaggressions, harassment, and even cyber-bullying can happen; give examples of what that can look like to clarify this for students.
 - » If you work for a U.S. academic institution like a college or university, you (or the office that advocates for student rights) are likely a mandatory reporter for Title IX incidents. In this case, the process is fairly straightforward, and there will be defined point people to work with. Make sure this is shared with the on-site provider and that you will work with them to resolve any incidents, as well as needing information on what training staff receive.
 - » For on-site providers, it is important to continue training to make staff aware of harassment and microaggressions, and that the same expectations of behavior are in place. Provide information about this training to partner institutions.
 - » Recorded training sessions may be useful when having discussions about sensitive issues, as long as everyone consents to be on a recording. This may also be a challenge for underrepresented or marginalized staff who are concerned this could be used against them if they discuss incidents that have occurred.

Advising students on cultural differences that will still be present in virtual programs.

Intercultural engagement is one of the most important aspects of a virtual program; this is essential for students to develop skills in working and communicating with individuals from different backgrounds. In a virtual program, understanding communication styles, perception of time, notions of one's relation to others (i.e., individualism vs. collectivism), body language, and hand gestures are especially important for communication online. Understanding this prior to their program can help students navigate video calls and group assignments, and complete tasks or work for an overseas company. The information in [Appendix C](#) presents several important concepts regarding intercultural communication and scenarios that advisors and program staff can use to demonstrate how students may be impacted throughout their virtual program.

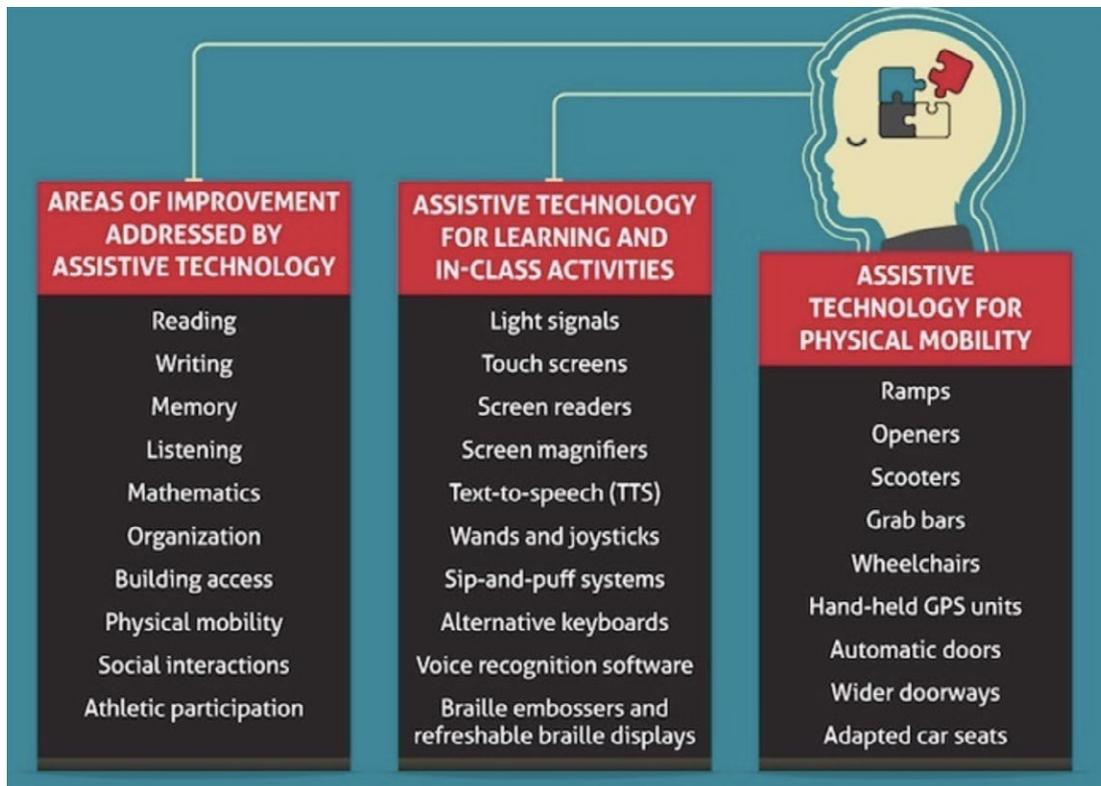
Assuring institutions and providers are aligned. If a college or university is partnering with a provider organization to offer virtual programs, it's critical for both partners to communicate and discuss how their goals and processes may align. The following are some considerations for both institutions and providers to consider when partnering together on virtual programs:

- Teamwork is more important than ever in a virtual program! Both sides will be limited in the communication and resources they provide to students, so keeping roles clear is helpful when students have less time to meet, get to know, and even see staff or faculty in person. This is also true advisor to advisor, or university staff to on-site staff.
- With post-experience surveys, avoid over surveying. Getting the other institution's survey questions beforehand can assist in compiling a master document, or keeping surveys separate, and eliminating common questions to share with afterward. Be very clear in the wording of each survey which party you are asking the student to assess.
- Be mindful of power dynamics that may exist between institutions or that create a hierarchy. Running virtual programs is essential and valuable to all study abroad organizations and academic institutions.
- Understand the scope of curricula or coursework students are receiving (and if it is too much or too little) to ensure that the student is receiving the experience they desire or expected.

ACCESSIBILITY TO TECHNOLOGY

When operating primarily in a virtual environment, there are important factors to consider to ensure that all information and services are accessible to the students you are serving.

- Institutions may need to provide resources to ensure students can connect.
 - » Some students do not have laptops, the preferred equipment for most virtual programs. Many institutions are implementing lending systems through their library or technology office. Be sure to understand where to refer students if they have these needs.
 - » Many homes, whether in inner-city or rural areas, do not have stable internet, so it is helpful to specify if any lending services can offer hotspots or Wifi boosters; these have proven to be very effective.
 - * Example 1: Students living on tribal land are often in rural areas that do not have the same access to internet installation, and it may be an undue burden on them to have internet service providers come out.
 - * Example 2: Students living in large metro areas, where one router could be shared for the whole building or apartment block, will not work well for high-definition videos, video calls, or large file downloads.
 - » If obtaining a computer is not possible, can this work be done on a tablet or phone? Be clear about the limits and different modalities of these options.
 - » Headsets or headphones are usually essential, especially when students are sharing a home environment with others.
- There may be additional considerations for students with special learning needs or students with disabilities.
 - » Consider additional assistive technology students might need such as closed captioning, additional hearing aids, or magnifiers for screens. Advisors should provide resources for or advocate for the institutions to provide resources for students. See the sections below on accessible resources and events for more information.
 - » If a student normally requires tutoring, advisors can create “pop in” office hours or dedicate extra time to offer one-on-one interaction with students.
 - » Are there opportunities for students to be paired up to be “accountabilibuddies” or mentors? This could be especially helpful for students who have anxiety or other considerations that make them more likely to open up in one-on-one settings.



Source: University of Cincinnati

Accessible Virtual Resources: Below are some essential tips for designing accessible online resources or courses. This information is based on resources collected by the [Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology](#) or DO-IT, an organization at University of Washington that promotes the success of individuals with disabilities in postsecondary education and careers, using technology as an empowering tool. Refer to the [Additional Resources section](#) below for resources with additional tips.

- Use descriptive wording for any hyperlink text
- Provide concise text descriptions of content presented within images (resource: <https://www.washington.edu/accessibility/documents/>)
- Use color combinations that are high contrast and can be read by those who are colorblind (resource: <https://developer.paciellogroup.com/resources/contrastanalyser/>)
- Caption videos and transcribe audio content (resource: <https://www.washington.edu/accessibility/videos/>)
- If using other video content (e.g., YouTube videos), make sure to use videos that have closed captioning

Accessible Virtual Events: When planning a virtual event, consider the following tips and guidelines to ensure the event is accessible to students with a variety of needs and abilities. This information is based on recommendations and insights from virtual audiences of people with diverse disabilities, gathered by MIUSA (Mobility International USA) to get input and feedback on improving full access to and during virtual events. See more at <https://www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/virtualaccessibility>.

- Select an accessible format:
 - » Ensure the platform you're using allows for computer-based audio listening/speaking and phone-based audio listening/speaking. If users call in by phone, they don't have access to the interpretation.
 - » Offer multiple ways for attendees to participate, including answering and submitting questions, and interacting with others.
 - » Check compatibility with assistive technology (e.g., screen reader software).
 - » Verify the ability for attendees and others to direct chat messages to the host or to other assigned staff to request tech assistance or share comments.
 - » Review any security/privacy issues.
 - » Research platform accessibility features. Share platform accessibility information with virtual attendees. Refer to the [Additional Resources section](#) below for links to accessibility information for common platforms.
- Budget for common disability-related accommodations:
 - » [Real-time captioning \(CART\)](#) and video captioning
 - » ASL Interpreters
 - » [Certified Deaf Interpreters](#): mostly used for international deaf audiences who are not fluent in ASL
- Communicate directly with individual participants with disabilities prior to the event to better understand any access needs they might have in order to fully participate. To learn what types of accommodations may be needed, consider including the following messaging and questions during the registration process:
 - » "We welcome people with disabilities. For questions about accessibility or to request a disability-related accommodation, please contact..."
 - » "Disability-related accommodations available upon request. Please place your request by [date] to allow us time to arrange. We will make our best effort to accommodate requests made after this window."
 - » "To request disability-related accommodations, please indicate your specific needs here:"

- Considerations for users with visual disabilities:
 - » Verbally describe visuals such as images/photos, videos, and what is occurring on screen, including polls.
 - » Enable audio description when showing videos on Netflix, YouTube, or other services.
 - » Plan for engagement, but limit overlapping activities such as allowing people to send chat messages during the presentation. Sometimes text to voice screen readers automatically read the messages in the chat box, which can create a distraction for attendees with visual disabilities.
 - » Make sure all participants understand how to and can access the process for call-outs, polling, and other engagement activities.
 - » Read out all chats or polling, such as “Looks like we have 40% nos and 60% yeses from the poll.”
 - » Ask people speaking to say their name every time they speak so captioners and attendees understand who is talking.
 - » Provide alternative formats if needed (Word, accessible PDF, electronic format, send materials ahead of time, etc.).
 - » Caption videos and add alt text to all images shown.
 - » Use a webinar platform that works with screen readers and allows attendees to control the interface with keyboard commands.
- Considerations for users with hearing disabilities:
 - » Make sure the audio is clear. Reduce background noise.
 - » Have presenters/discussion leaders use a headset (if available).
 - » Mute people who are not speaking.
 - » Offer live captioning and real-time interpretation (when possible). In addition to helping those who have hearing disabilities, captioning can also be helpful for attendees in loud environments, attendees whose native language is different, or for focusing attention for all attendees. However, captions may be more difficult to consume for ESL attendees, so it’s important to ask whether ASL interpretation may also be needed.
 - » Limit the number of people on screen at a time in order to make interpreters more visible.
 - » Ask people speaking to say their name every time they speak so captioners and attendees know who is talking.
 - » Organize a pre-event meeting with interpreters for preparation, event agenda review, and test run.
 - » If using human captioners, provide them with as much information ahead of time about the event (e.g., names/titles of presenters, slides, outline of content, etc.)
 - » Ensure interpreters and deaf participants are visible to each other.

- » Ensure deaf attendees, deaf presenters, ASL interpreters, and the captioner can directly message event planners for any technology issues, such as not seeing the interpreter/deaf presenter.
- Considerations for users with mobility disabilities:
 - » Offer key command options for engagement.
 - » Schedule breaks for longer meetings to enable movement and to lessen fatigue.
 - » Be flexible with screen time. Do not require “video on” at all times.
- Other considerations:
 - » Use accessible and plain language; avoid using jargon.
 - » Provide a glossary of terms.
 - » Leave time for information processing and sharing of questions.
 - » Offer the option to have messages read aloud by the host or other support staff.
 - » Do not use flashing or strobing animations such as virtual backgrounds.
 - » If using slides, use content that people can refer to later or reference during the meeting, and share them before and after the event when possible.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Below are some additional resources for ensuring that the technology and platforms you are using are accessible to all students.

- [20 Tips for Teaching an Accessible Online Course](#): put together by [Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology](#), an organization at University of Washington that promotes the success of individuals with disabilities in postsecondary education and careers, using technology as an empowering tool
- [Dos and Don'ts on designing for accessibility](#): best design practices for making services accessible in government (for users from these areas: low vision, D/deaf and hard of hearing, dyslexia, motor disabilities, users on the autistic spectrum, and users of screen readers)
- [Virtual Accessibility resources handout](#): list of resources compiled by Texas A&M University Education Abroad and Mobility International USA on making virtual events and resources accessible
- [Canvas Accessibility](#)
- [Zoom Accessibility](#)
- [Microsoft Teams Accessibility](#)

- Google Hangouts
 - » [Use Hangouts with a Screen Reader](#)
 - » [Keyboard Shortcuts for Hangouts](#)
- [Panopto Accessibility](#)
- Google Workspace (formerly G Suite)
 - » [Google Workspace User Guide to Accessibility](#)
 - » [Google Workspace Admin Guide to Accessibility](#)
- [Microsoft Office 365 Accessibility](#)
- [Adobe's Accessible PDFs](#)
- WebAIM
 - » WebAIM's guides for creating accessible documents that can be converted into accessible PDFs: <https://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/> and <https://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/converting>
 - » [Web AIMS Accessible Powerpoints](#)
 - » [Web AIM's Accessible Word Documents](#)

CONCLUSION

The members of Diversity Abroad's Student Support and Advising Task Force hope this toolkit will be helpful in enhancing efforts to make virtual advising and global education programming more accessible, equitable, and inclusive. These resources have been collated to provide advisors, administrators, and on-site staff with quick access to what students can expect in virtual spaces related to global education. As virtual environments become more prevalent globally, additional research and practice will certainly inform future enhancements to this document. Our task force welcomes your feedback as you utilize this document to develop strategies for student support in virtual spaces.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE VIRTUAL OFFICES

[Chapman University's virtual office](#) includes one main office that links to advisor offices and a resource slide. This also announces Zoom drop-in times and different ways to connect with the office on social media.



[Siena Abroad](#) includes an audio file along with highlights of certain programs.



[Arcadia Abroad](#) includes a map feature that links to video clips from those locations, information on scholarships, and resources relating to equity, diversity, and inclusion.



APPENDIX B: SAMPLE VIRTUAL STUDY ABROAD FAIRS

Below are some examples of how various U.S. universities have set up their virtual study abroad fairs:

[University of North Dakota](#): embedded videos and resources on website

Fall 2020 Study Abroad Fair

Welcome to the virtual Fall 2020 Study Abroad Fair.

We're so glad you are joining the first ever UND Study Abroad virtual Study Abroad Fair! The main event will take place September 14-19 and these resources will stay available all semester. The mission of the virtual Fair is to raise awareness of study abroad opportunities at UND and help students answer the question "Where do I start?"

Navigate the Virtual Fair

There are numerous ways to interact with the Fair:

1. Watch our [welcome message](#).
2. Follow our [social media accounts](#) for example programs by College.
3. View our [recorded sessions](#) to learn about study abroad experiences directly from alumni and a special session on scholarships, too.
4. Check out our [new video resources](#) for more detailed information.
5. View our [partner content](#) to learn what it's like on-site.
6. Review our [frequently asked questions](#).
7. Start your [Traveler Profile](#) to explore program options.
8. [Connect with us](#) to continue the conversation.

Welcome Message



[California State University, Chico](#)

Created on Google Slides:





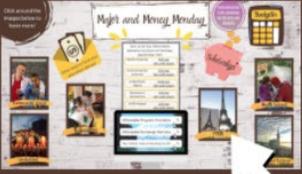
#UWYOABROAD

VIRTUAL FAIR

Schedule of Events

Click the links below to join live Zoom sessions in Mountain Daylight Time:
Links to recorded presentation slides will be uploaded if you missed the session.

Monday



- [Health Sciences Majors Info Session: 9:00- 9:30 AM](#)
 - [Presentation Slides](#)
- [Money Matters Presentation \(Finances, Scholarships, and more!\); 10:00-10:30am](#)
 - [Presentation Slides](#)
- [Environmental Sciences Majors Info Session: 11:00-11:30 AM](#)
 - [Presentation Slides](#)
- [Undeclared Majors Info Session: 12:00-12:30 PM](#)
 - [Presentation Slides](#)
- [College of Business Info Session: 1:00-1:30 PM](#)
 - [Presentation Slides](#)
- [STEM Majors Info Session: 4:00-4:30 PM](#)
 - [Presentation Slides](#)

Tuesday



- [University of Birmingham, England Info Session: 9:00 AM - 9:30 AM](#)
 - [Program Page](#)
- [University of East Anglia, England Info Session: 10:00 AM - 10:30 AM](#)
 - [Program Page](#)
- [Swansea University, Wales: 11:00 AM - 11:30 AM](#)
 - [Program Page](#)
- [University of Stirling, Scotland Information Session: 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM](#)
 - [Program Page](#)
- [La Universidad Autonoma del Yucatan, Mexico: 3:00 PM - 3:30 PM](#)
 - [Program Page](#)

Wednesday

NEXT 

Tips for your resume, cover letter, and interviews



Watch the 5-minute video above for a quick tutorial on how to best incorporate study abroad into your career preparations.

- Make a virtual appointment with NC State's Career Development Center: <https://careers.dasa.ncsu.edu/>
- Join the NC State Study Abroad Alumni Network on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12429359/>

Overview of resources & opportunities

Returning from studying abroad can be an exciting, but also a challenging experience (even under *normal* circumstances). These select resources, programs, and organizations are designed to keep you connected with *all-things-international* at NC State and beyond, as well as help you process and make-meaning out of your time abroad.

Happy exploring!

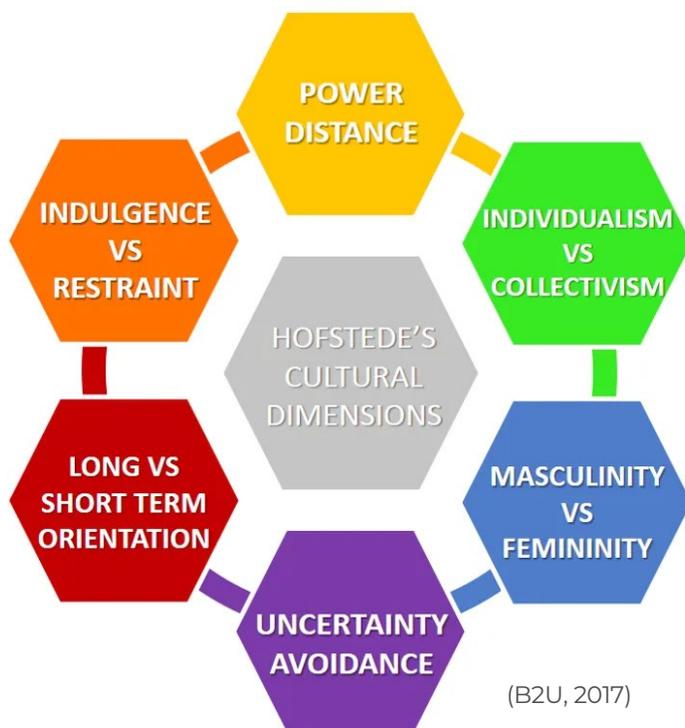
- Ways to go abroad again
- Tips for your resume & cover letter
- Campus organizations & programs
- Help with cultural readjustment
- Exit the virtual fair

APPENDIX C: EXAMPLES OF VIRTUAL CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The following section presents several important concepts regarding intercultural communication and scenarios that advisors and program staff can use to demonstrate how students may be impacted throughout their virtual program.

Example 1: Cultural Dimensions

Cultural dimensions (Hofstede et. al, 2008) are a spectrum of different cultural values that can help individuals understand their own values and how they interact with others who may have similar or different value placements. Refer to <http://www.geerthofstede.nl/> for more information and definitions of each dimension. The scenarios below demonstrate some examples of how these dimensions may impact a student's program experience.



Virtual Scenario 1: A student is working in an internship with a Finnish education company and has worked very hard to complete a large assignment for them. When they make the presentation and show their deliverable, they are excited to see their audience's reaction but are disappointed at what they see as a neutral one. They are visibly upset for the rest of the meeting, and for a while after. They think they may not get credit for their internship and send a panicked email to their internship advisor at the study abroad office. The advisor walks them through how the credit may transfer back, and says they will check in about this at their final meeting with the

internship provider the next day. After this is discussed at the final meeting, the student gets an email the next day from their internship's director: they receive amazing praise in the email. After discussing with their advisor, the student learns that the reaction of their Finnish colleagues is an example of how Finnish culture values restraint more than indulgence.

Virtual Scenario 2: a Latinx U.S. American student participating in a virtual exchange at a university in South Korea is taken aback when students from that university do not often speak up or ask questions during class. They are finding it difficult to connect with their classmates and know how they may be doing in the class. The student learns during a check-in with their advisor that this could be due to different perceptions of hierarchy, or power distance, between students and teachers in South Korea than in the US, and that students often communicate more outside of the course. The advisor suggests possible strategies the student could take, such as arranging study hours with a few classmates, finding online forums for students at the university, or speaking with the professor one-on-one to get feedback.

Example 2: Body Language and Communication

The following examples highlight the ways in which body language can have distinctly different meanings in different cultures (Rugsaken, 2006).

**BODY LANGUAGE
AROUND THE WORLD**

HEAD

Nodding your head generally means agreement or approval.

But Bulgarians and Greeks, for example, are known for their unusual manner of saying yes and no: Nodding up and down signifies a negative.

Virtual Scenario: A student is going on a virtual tour of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India with a tour guide, and the tour guide is stopping to ask questions that the student audience has for locals. They are supposed to answer specific questions, but the student keeps seeing people moving their head side-to-side in a tilting way. The tour guide clears this up by mentioning that this means “uh huh” in India instead of nodding your head.

EYES



Good eye contact is expected in the **West**. Strong eye contact is most notable in **Spain, Greece, and Arab** countries.



Finns and Japanese are embarrassed by another's stare, and seek eye contact only at the beginning of a conversation.

Virtual Scenario: A student has two computer screens to do their Spanish language courses with a university in Spain. They do not look at the monitor in meetings with the instructors because the camera is on the side monitor, not the one they look at to complete classwork. They are chided for not paying attention, even though they were. Their advisor lets them know that eye contact is very important in Spain to show the listener is engaged.

EARS

The **Portuguese** tug their earlobes to indicate tasty food, but in **Italy** this gesture has sexual connotations,



...and in **Spain** it means someone is not paying for their drinks.

Virtual Scenario: A student is on the autism spectrum, and one of their tics is to tug their earlobe. They do this often in a meeting with exchange students at an Italian university they are working with on a food and culture course. They feel embarrassed when people are giggling, and commenting “What’s with the ear, X?” in the chat. Their instructor apologizes after and lets them know about tugging ears in Italy. They agree that it is fine for the student to turn off their camera to not feel as much anxiety.

NOSE

A hearty nose blow into a handkerchief is typical in the **West**, while public nose blowing is frowned upon by the **Japanese**.



Tapping your nose means “confidential” in **England**, but “watch out” in **Italy**.



Virtual Scenario: A student has a cold and is participating in a virtual program in Japan with a lot of one-on-one meetings as part of language/cultural exchange. In one of the meetings, they blow their nose to help with their speaking, and their partner becomes very annoyed. They let them know that you don't usually blow your nose in front of people in Japan. The student apologizes and explains it is more common in the US, then they begin a lively conversation on how there is no phrase for “bless you” in Japanese.

ARMS

Many cultures use their arms freely, as in **Italy**, where they often wave their arms around when talking, or the **US**. But **northern Europeans** find it hard to tolerate gesturing with the arms,

associating it with insincerity and over-dramatization. In **Japan**, gesturing with broad arm movements is considered impolite.



Virtual Scenario: A student in a graduate course on the history of colonization and ethical service-work is communicating with a group of people. The on-site staff have to watch their presentation on university service-work. People seem disinterested and confused at first. Then the student remembers the importance of hand gestures to emphasize points, and steps back from the camera a bit. After this change, audience reception improves.

HANDS

The **American** "goodbye" wave can be interpreted as the signal for "no" in many parts of **Europe** and **Latin America**.



The **Italian** goodbye wave can be interpreted by **Americans** as "come here." The **American** "come here" gesture can be seen as an insult in most **Asian** countries.



In **Malaysia** it is taboo to point with your index finger, but you can point with your thumb. "Thumbs up" is used in many cultures, none more so than **Brazil** however,



...where the signal is used everywhere. However, it's a rude sexual signal in some **Islamic** countries, **Sardinia**, and **Greece**, and can signify the number "1" in **France**.

In a virtual business seminar on Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore, there is a panel of business leaders from each country for students to listen to. The guest lecturer from Malaysia asks the class if they can hear her alright, and many of them give an enthusiastic thumbs up. Because the business owner is aware of this signal in the U.S. American context, they laugh a bit and begin the presentation, starting with explaining why they laughed.



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