



USA Study Abroad



World Learning
Education · Development · Exchange

IDEAS
INCREASE & DIVERSIFY
EDUCATION ABROAD
FOR U.S. STUDENTS

IDEAS + AACRAO Webinar FAQs

IDEAS Webinar – *Transcripts, Translations, and Transfers, Oh My! A Registrar’s Perspective on Study Abroad*

The following is an account of relevant questions and answers from the webinar *Transcripts, Translations, and Transfers, Oh My! A Registrar’s Perspective on Study Abroad*, co-hosted by the IDEAS Program and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers ([AACRAO](#)). The responses have been provided by the webinars’ presenters: Opal Leeman Bartzis, Ed.D (Executive Director of Education Abroad, Michigan State University), Amy Pitts (Registrar, Study Abroad Office, Northern Illinois University), and Julia Funaki (Director, AACRAO – International).

This document is posted in the [IDEAS Library of Resources](#), along with recording of the webinar and slides.

Pre-Approval Timeline and Flexibility

1. We sometimes have issues with departments being very strict about certain courses needing to be taken at our institution. What strategies have you used to talk with faculty/departments about accepting overseas classes as equivalents to home courses? Or for advocating for departments to make space in their programs for study abroad (especially for semesters)?

A1:

Sometimes it is impossible to effectively make the case, but some strategies that have helped include discussion of how allowing students to fulfill home institution requirements with courses abroad internationalizes the student’s degree, gives them an international perspective on their academic area, will enrich classroom discussions upon their return, etc. It can be incorporated into departmental and university strategic plans. And, for the establishment of exchange agreements or unit-sponsored direct enroll agreements, assurance of credit transfer can be a matter that is settled from the outset.

In these cases at Northeastern Illinois University (NIU), the student is usually able to receive INTL credit so that they are still able to take the courses that interest them. If they are able to obtain a better syllabus, they can try to have it re-evaluated while they are abroad.

2. Do your INTL umbrella courses just count as general elective credits?

A2:

The INTL umbrella courses count as hours towards graduation. If there is not an exact NIU equivalency within the department, the Committee on the Undergraduate Curriculum (CUC) approved INTL (Study Abroad) 101, 201, 301, and 401, offered through the Division of International Programs, to be used for courses taught abroad that are disciplinary but for which there is no direct departmental equivalent. INTL courses may be repeated at each course level up to 9 credit hours.

3. Many of the students complete our form, but once they arrive, classes may be full, or even cancelled. How do you handle those unplanned changes that can’t go through the normal approval process?

A3:



USA Study Abroad



World Learning
Education · Development · Exchange

IDEAS
INCREASE & DIVERSIFY
EDUCATION ABROAD
FOR U.S. STUDENTS

At Michigan State University (MSU), we advise students to stay in touch with their advisors while abroad for situations like this. They can submit a new course approval request in our homegrown system to have unanticipated courses approved.

At NIU, we have the students approve the courses while they are abroad.

4. I am new to my position. Do you have any tips about accessing course syllabi from international institutions?

A4:

Your international partners should be able to direct you to course syllabi or at least detailed course descriptions. Sometimes syllabi are simply not available from host institutions, as they are instead shared with students as the class begins. Advise students to send syllabi to your office/their advisors as they receive them. Keeping a repository of syllabi is another approach, especially if you see students taking the same courses over the years. While the stored syllabi may not always be current, they will at least give faculty or those approving courses something to work with.

5. How have the panelists handled communicating and working with different departments to handle work, especially with registering incoming exchange students for courses?

A5:

At MSU, we have a list of contacts in each of our academic colleges who work with our exchanges coordinator on students' course enrollments. We also maintain lists of typically available courses and departments that restrict access.

At NIU we have a list of contacts that the students can use to help them know where to seek approval. If they have questions, then I work with them to get them to the correct person.

6. I work with engineering students, and we find it difficult for courses to meet the ABET accreditation standards in our course approval process. I would love to find more options for our students beyond our faculty-led programs. Does anyone know if there are provider programs that are ABET accredited, or where to find them?

A6:

I would say you should look at providers that are themselves accredited U.S. institutions. Many are not, but some are. Otherwise, providers may support direct enrollment options at ABET-accredited institutions abroad, even if the provider themselves is not accredited.

Transcripts and Delays

7. Could the panel touch on how the Registrar manages students' accounts when transcripts are delayed from the overseas institution? Particularly between the fall and spring semesters when students often rely on evidence of having taken courses abroad in order to enroll into a future course.

A7:

As far as enrollment, at MSU the placeholder credit placed on the student's record when they study abroad remains on the student's record until the transcripts have been processed, so the student shows as having full time enrollment for the semester even if they do not have the actual courses posted yet. This will allow them to enroll in courses for the next semester. However, if students have issues related to enrollment in specific courses back at MSU that require a pre-requisite that they took abroad, the student could show their [MSU Course Approval Form](#) with the equivalency, and we recommend that they provide proof of enrollment in the course at their host university. They are



USA Study Abroad



World Learning
Education · Development · Exchange

IDEAS
INCREASE & DIVERSIFY
EDUCATION ABROAD
FOR U.S. STUDENTS

usually able to work with the department that offers the course they need to secure an override. Our office (Education Abroad) can also supply the student and/or department with documentation to explain why the course has not been posted to their record yet.

At NIU, the grade is left open until I receive the overseas transcript. At that time, Registration and Records will post them to the student record. The departments have been understanding when the class is there but not the grade if the student needs to take the next class in a series.

8. Opal, you read a great list of ways your institution advises students to mitigate a negative impact of having a delayed transcript from the overseas institution. Would you share that, if available?

A8:

A continuing challenge – and one that we have little control over – is the length of time it sometimes takes to receive international transcripts from abroad. Some actions that can be taken to mitigate that potentially difficult process include:

- Reminding students while they are abroad that their academic records abroad should be accurate reflections of the work they undertook, which means following up on any drops, adds, etc.
- Reminding students of the importance of sitting their exams and securing confirmations of receipt for final projects.
- Ensuring you have current contact information for international partners in charge of issuing transcripts.
- Reminding international partners that official transcripts are needed as quickly as possible in order to complete the credit transfer process.
- Warning graduating seniors upfront during the education abroad planning process that delayed transcripts may mean that credit transfer is not completed in time to fulfill graduation requirements.
- Advising students to bring home copies of their graded work and their syllabi to assist in case of any question of their credits and grades earned.
- Reminding students to clear any financial obligations to their host institutions, to ensure they do not have financial holds on their transcripts.
- Encouraging students to be sure they understand the process for requesting the host institution transcript to be sent to their home institution.

9. Do you accept study abroad provider grade reports to post student grades/credits to your home institution transcripts? Is there any difference between School of Record and third-party transcript providers?

A9:

As a general rule, MSU requires official transcripts (from the host institution or the School of Record) as the official academic record of the student's study abroad. School of Record transcripts come from accredited institutions that can grant credit. Third party providers may not be able to grant credit but can suggest credit or report credit. The recommendation is to refer to the AACRAO/Forum on Education [Guidelines on School of Record Relationships](#) in Education Abroad.

At NIU, we receive the official transcript along with a grade report from our partner institutions.



USA Study Abroad



World Learning
Education · Development · Exchange

IDEAS
INCREASE & DIVERSIFY
EDUCATION ABROAD
FOR U.S. STUDENTS

10. Do you accept transcripts digitally that have a log-in and separate authentication from partners (getting away from paper)?

A10:

Yes, MSU does.

NIU does accept digital transcripts.

11. How do your offices view and bring in early start programs (i.e. an intensive course that gets coupled with a semester program)? And, more specifically, if the early start program has 10 ECTS for a single course, how does your institution bring those credit back for that course and does the course get split into two smaller credit courses?

A11:

The Early Start portion of the expanded semester usually consists of its own credit-bearing course, so that course should be converted according to its host institution credit allocation, just as any other course would be. ECTS (European Credit Transfer Credits) are converted at U.S. institutions in a variety of ways. The typical semester course load at an ECTS institution is 30 ECTS, so that's equivalent to roughly 15 U.S. semester credit hours. The typical course at an ECTS institution is valued at 5 ECTS, so a pure conversion would be 2.5 U.S. credits. That's problematic for many institutions, so many will round up to 3 credits to fit their systems. Others stick to the 2.5 and require the student to complete an additional assignment to justify the additional .5 credits. Others have found creative ways to combine courses, often resulting in courses valued at 5 credits at the U.S. institution.

Systems and Other Processes

12. What specific system do you use to facilitate approvals? Is it unique to your institution or do you use some "off-the-shelf" software?

A12:

At MSU, we use a homegrown system for our online course approval form.

At NIU, we do not have an online system yet. We currently use paper forms for credit approval.

13. For forms requiring signatures, do you use DocuSign or a different software? We have struggled with students understanding the DocuSign format. What kind of software is used to move along the signatures that also informs the students as it moves?

A13:

MSU does not use a software for signatures on course approvals, as the process does not require a signature per se, but rather the completion of a field in our homegrown course approval system that is associated with a particular campus user. The "sign off" mentioned is rather the completion of a box indicating approval that is attached to specific university personnel. Notes can be added.

14. How do you coordinate Course Program of Study (CPOS) evaluations for applicability of financial aid? We will be entering our first year of CPOS audits and our financial aid office wants to use on-campus add/drop deadlines to review course enrollment. This timeline does not align with most programs.

A14:

This is currently a topic of discussion at MSU. Given we are still working through it, my advice would be to work closely with your financial aid compliance officer.