

## ***General Advising Principles***

(taken in part from ‘Advising Principles and Strategies’ by Cynthia Felbeck Chalou, Barbara Lantz, Janeen Felsing and Kathy Lutfi in *NAFSA’s Guide to Education Abroad for Advisers and Administrators*, ed. William Hoffa and John Pearson, 1997.)

In the initial contacts, it is important to establish an open and honest relationship. Find out a little about the student: year in school, major and minor discipline, academic background, previous travel, language competency, occupational interest, time of year planned for going abroad, possible length of stay, tentative thoughts on study versus travel or other experience abroad, preferred amount of program structure and guidance, financial resources, and parental attitude. Discuss with the student their preferred learning style. This information is fundamental to assisting a student in defining his or her personal abilities, goals, and perceptions.

This background lays the foundation for the most important question of all: “What are your reasons for wanting to go abroad?” At this initial stage, some students will have a clear idea of what they hope to accomplish, while others will not—they simply want to experience another culture and are open to a variety of possibilities.

The general principle is that it is best to go abroad primarily for a unique learning experience. It is never wise to go only to escape from problems existing in the home situation. Inform students that, while a change of location may at first seem to relieve some personal pressures, the problems may be considerably increased by anxieties. These are often caused by the loss of security of a familiar setting and the need for adjustment to a foreign culture, educational system, and social environment.

Some students may seek to go abroad to be closer to friends or family. If this is the case, recommend an experience that fulfills that need. Instead of exploring expensive study abroad opportunities, work or volunteer abroad may be an option, enabling the student to be close to loved ones without the expense.

In most cases, a student has already discussed studying abroad with their parents or friends. If there is hesitancy or reluctance concerning their reasons for wanting to go abroad, delicately probe the issue. If parental support appears to be a barrier, suggest to the student that an OSA staff member would be willing to contact the parents directly. By providing basic information and reassurance, you can ease the minds of both the parents and student.

The student should be reminded that a study-abroad experience requires careful planning, usually four to twelve months. Longer lead-time is needed for longer programs. Time is needed to initiate discussion with the student’s academic department to determine transfer credit equivalency. The adviser and student should determine what effect study abroad might have on degree credit, time of graduation, and advantage in the job market after graduation.

Refer students to persons whose knowledge about a particular area of the world is more current and extensive than your own. These resources include students, faculty, and community members returned from abroad; international students, scholars and community members; and returned Peace Corps volunteers. Students who have returned from the same program or institution abroad will be able to answer the specific questions which are often pressing for the

outgoing student; and other resource persons may provide supplementary information and insight.

To supplement the application process, provide advice on institutional policies and procedures pertaining to:

- The payment of tuition and/or program fees
- Refunds if the student does not go or withdraws before the program is completed
- Prior approval for courses taken abroad, if required
- Registration, housing, and other on-campus issues upon return

Throughout the entire advising process, supply suggestions and guidelines to assist the student in further defining personal goals, in addition to supplying the information previously discussed. When you do not know an answer, either find the information requested or recommend a person or address to contact for information.