

Office of Study Abroad Michigan State University Guide to Site Visits

General Planning and Site Specific Questions

This document serves as a tool to assist you with site visits to existing and proposed programs. Some aspects may not apply to your situation, but the Michigan State University Office of Study Abroad (OSA) hopes this outline will cover the majority of issues to address on-site.

Site visits should include:

- Classroom visits
- Meeting with program faculty, administration, and students
- Program sponsored cultural activity
- Explanations of specific program tracks and overall academics
- Overview of program orientation and administration
- Tours of housing (dorms, apartments, home stays, dining facilities)
- Tours of classroom facilities and attend classes in session
- Tours of administrative facilities
- Tours of host universities
- Opportunity to build professional relationships with on-site staff

Site visit responsibilities:

- Arrange to meet with appropriate OSA staff to discuss any site-specific issues and financial matters
- For existing programs, participate in the program and duplicate the student experience as closely as possible
- For existing programs, submit a report to OSA that describes the site visit activities and impressions, and list the positive program features and those that need improvement
- For new program development, submit a site visit report to the Director of the Office of Study Abroad within 30 days of the return from the site visit

Planning/Scheduling Tips:

- Develop comprehensive plan including visit objectives, timelines and outcomes
- Participate in learning activities - classes, excursions, group meetings
- Conduct site visits with another person or a small group of people, if possible, because different individuals notice different things. Visits are tiring and one's attention can flag at times, so it is nice to have the back-up.
- Review all your materials prior to departure - know the main points for consideration and the history behind them.
- Ask lots of questions
- Meet with everyone you possibly can, either one-on-one or in small groups: directors, discipline-specific instructors, department chairs, support staff, language instructors, home stay coordinator, lecturers and students. Plan enough time for all these people.

- Try to experience daily life/culture as the students would (take the bus, go to a grocery store, eat at a student restaurant right around the corner from the site)
- Discuss issues with faculty and directors of programs: language placement, methodology, grading, typical teaching style, program design, challenges
- Take detailed notes - record information carefully
- Organize time efficiently - use some time to see the students and teachers in action. Make the opportunity to talk about methodology
- Talk to colleagues prior to the visit in order to further your knowledge of the program or institution and maximize on-site time
- Tour the facilities and surrounding area
- Interact and talk with students (if this is a proposed co-sponsored program)
- Observe, listen, do NOT impose U.S. values
- Look for substance - learn about expectations and outcomes
- Plan visits when staff has time to commit to your visit and when students are involved in their routine (if a co-sponsored program)
- Contact local, non-program people for information on local issues and culture

Effective Site Visits:

1. Identify issues and interests with those in and around the location/program (internal and external to the program)
2. Research site/program to further identify areas of interest
 - Program mission, goals, objectives
 - Current issues and needs
 - Cultural context
 - History of evaluation
3. Clearly outline objectives
 - Areas to gain knowledge
 - Issues to understand
 - Challenges to discuss
 - Actions to take
4. Communicate goals with those involved
5. Develop comprehensive plan
 - Include objectives, timelines, possible outcomes
6. Plan activities to specifically meet these goals
7. Observe, question, listen, analyze
 - Search for balanced and useful information
8. Report information
 - Collect as much information as possible
 - Use direct personal experiences
 - Provide rich and complete descriptions
9. Match information and formats to specific audience

Suggested Site Visit Questions

Part I: Academics

Immigration & Visa Requirements

1. Do U.S. students need to receive a student visa?
2. If so, how?
3. How much does it cost?

Institutional Background/Culture

1. Is the host institution a private college, publically-funded institution (i.e., host country degree-granting)?
2. Is it American-accredited institution, or other? Include a catalog if possible.
3. What is the faculty to student ratio?
4. What percentage of the faculty has advanced degrees?
5. How much contact do the faculty have with students outside the classroom?
6. What kind of contact do U.S. students have with students from the host country?
7. What is the student population?
8. What is the percentage of international students?
9. Do all students receive a transcript from the university with an official seal?

Academic Facilities/Resources

1. Describe the library facilities.
 - Are the resources adequate for the program?
 - Do students have access to other libraries, either at other universities in the area or in the city?
2. Comment on the computing facilities.
 - Do students have access to computers and e-mail?
 - Do they get an email account for free?
 - What are the computer labs hours?
 - Do you recommend that students bring their own laptop? (Please address suggested safety measures for having computer equipment).

Courses/Instruction

1. What courses are available to international students each semester?
2. How can students obtain course descriptions and syllabi?
3. What is the typical semester course load?
4. What are the academic calendar dates?
5. What is the language of instruction?
6. If English is not the language of instruction, what is the language requirement?
7. Do students take an entrance exam or placement test when they arrive to determine if they can take regular university courses?
8. Are there any courses taught in English for international students?
9. If there are courses taught in English, are they part of a special program for international students?
10. Are beginning language courses available?
11. Is there an additional cost for these language courses? If so, how much?
12. Are there any restrictions on courses students can take (i.e., no science courses open to international students)? If so, please describe.
13. Are students given instruction on-site about appropriate course selection?
14. Are syllabi and reading lists available for courses?
15. What access do students have to assigned materials and to libraries and other information resources?

Assessment

1. How is student performance evaluated (tests, papers, presentations, etc.)? Describe grading system.

Part II: Classroom Visits

Classroom Visitations

1. For each course you visit, record the following:
 - course name
 - number of students in the class

- professor's name
 - other appropriate comments
2. If the course is conducted in a foreign language, please indicate the level and how much language preparation you have had.

Part III: Student Life

Support Services/Orientation

1. Who is the students' primary on-site contact? (name, title, address, telephone, fax, email)
2. What is the role of this person on campus? (teacher, administrator, advisor only)
3. Are students met at the airport?
4. When students arrive, will they receive an orientation from a local representative, organization or the program leaders?
 - If the orientation is to be provided by colleagues on-site, what will the orientation cover?
 - Will it include necessary advice on health, safety and security?
5. What field trips and other organized activities do students have access to while attending the institution (this includes clubs and other campus organizations)?

Social and Cultural Activities

If you had time to explore the city where the institution is located, please comment on the following questions related to the social and cultural activities available to students.

1. What kind of cultural events are available in the city where you visited?
2. Did you find the cultural activities of the city affordable and easily accessible?
3. Do you think students would have a difficult time getting access to these activities and events (i.e., too expensive, too far to travel, accessible for students with mobility issues, etc.)?
4. What (if any) arrangements were made to enable you to participate in any social or cultural events while you were visiting? If so, please describe.

Dress/Clothing

1. Are there certain types of dress that are required for certain physical or cultural activities?

2. What clothing customs can be shared with the students to improve their safety and well-being?

Financial Services

1. What is the country's official currency and its value as compared to the U.S. dollar?
2. How are most financial transaction completed? Cash, debit, or credit card?
3. What are the suggested ways of obtaining cash (ATM, currency exchange, etc.)?
4. If the student is staying for a semester or longer, is it possible to set-up an account at a local bank?

Trouble Shooting for Non-faculty-led Programs

5. If students have housing problems who should they speak to?
6. If students have an emergency who should they contact and what is the availability for this person?
7. If students have academic problems who should they speak to?
8. If students have visa problems who should they speak with?
9. If students have health concerns, who should they speak with?
10. If students have travel questions who should they talk to?

Part IV: Health, Safety and Logistics

Housing

1. What are the housing options (and the cost)?
 - on campus residences
 - off campus apartments
 - host-family, hotel
 - hostel
 - cabin
 - campground
 - other
2. If host families are an option, how are they selected and reviewed? What is the typical agreement or arrangement (for example, are meals included, does the student take his laundry out, etc.).

3. Describe the housing (singles/doubles, bathroom facilities, furnishings, internet access, cooking facilities or dining services, etc.)
4. What is the availability of telephone service, such as land lines or reasonably priced cell phones)? (Also consider whether or not skype is a viable option).
5. What type and level of security is provided by the housing? Are their gates, guards, swipe-cards, etc.?
6. If housing is provided in apartments or suites on or off campus, will students of the opposite sex be required to cohabit?
7. What is the location of housing, what is the local "take" on the safety of the area of housing?
8. What is its proximity to classes and public transportation? If students are required to take public transportation daily, how far is the walk to it and how much is the typical round-trip fare?
9. If this is a direct enrollment program, will the students be living with local students (as roommates, for example)?
10. Are housing services provided for students accompanied by spouses or partners and/or children? Please describe or attach information.
11. If housing is not provided, does the university assist with off-campus housing arrangements?
12. If no housing assistance is provided, how far in advance should students anticipate arriving to look for accommodations?
13. Do the campus and student housing provide accommodations for students with disabilities? If so, specify those disabilities (in general) which can be accommodated.
14. In case of an emergency, who will assist the students? Is this person accessible at all times?
15. Where are health facilities and how will students be assisted if they need medical assistance?
16. How is help provided for students with adjustment problems or other psychological issues?

Crime & Safety

1. Is there a US Department of State Travel Warning or Alert to this location? (See <http://travel.state.gov/>)
2. What is the general level of petty and violent crime?

3. Is there particular criminal activity associated with tourist areas?
4. Are there special safety concerns for female students? What is the country's perception of sexual assault and rape?
5. Are there special safety concerns for students that are gay, bisexual or transgender?
6. Does the country or city have a history of religious- or race-based crimes?
7. What is the threat of terrorism (with regards to country nationals)?
8. What is the threat of terrorism (with regards to foreigners and/or Americans)?
9. Is the country or city known for political demonstrations? Do they have a history of becoming violent?
10. Do students need to be made aware of possible natural disasters that could occur in this area (e.g. volcanoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis)?

Health

1. Is the tap water potable? If not, what is the availability of boiled or bottled water?
2. How will food allergies or preferences, such as vegetarianism, be handled?
3. Are their health risks particular to this region? (check the Center for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx>)
4. Are any vaccinations required (this is also necessary for budgeting costs of the program)?
5. What strategies will be in place to help students prepare for and prevent certain health risks? (for example, discussing food- and water-borne illnesses and prevention strategies)?
6. Is there a quality health care facility within 30 minutes of the students' location(s)? Contact Julie to get a referral from HTH if this is not readily apparent on-site.
7. Is there reliable emergency ground transportation, such as an ambulance service?
8. What procedures will be in place on site to respond to a medical emergency?
9. What special challenges may students with physical or other disabilities face in this location? Are there special services available to assist students with disabilities?
10. Are mental health care services readily available?

Transportation

1. How will students get to/from the airport?
2. If group transportation will be provided, what is the reputation of the proposed transport company? Safety record? Age and condition of fleet? Are they licensed and/or bonded?
3. Will driving occur at night? Is this considered unsafe in this location?
4. Will students need to use public transportation to get out on their own? What recommendations does the State Department make in the Country Information Sheet regarding public transportation? What specific advice can be given to students see they mitigate risk of harm in making a public transportation choice?

General Comments:

1. Please add any comments or information that you think would be helpful to the office or to future students considering this program.
2. Do you have any suggestions for improvements?
3. We may want to include personal quotes in future publications. Please indicate whether you would object to being quoted.

If you have any questions regarding your site visit, please feel free to contact the staff at the Office of Study Abroad, Michigan State University, 109 International Center, East Lansing, MI 48824-1035, Tel: 517-353-8920, Fax: 517-432-2082.

Thank you for helping to expand and improve our study abroad offerings at MSU!