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2020

## Honors Abroad through Third-Party Providers

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# Honors Abroad through Third-Party Providers

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Given the challenges of promoting internationalization by expanding our institutions' international student populations (Fischer), the development of our students as global citizens through study abroad and curriculum offerings appears more important than ever. Providing innovative and challenging curriculum options that align with the long-espoused pedagogical approaches of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC)—many of which foreshadowed today's highly touted high-impact practices such as undergraduate research, strong faculty-student mentor relationships, and study abroad—constitutes a desirable path to pursue (NCHC Board; Kuh). Yet, admittedly these valuable practices come with a price for institutions and students. For example, the increasingly popular summer undergraduate research programs or research experiences for undergraduates (REUs) that involve student stipends, lodging costs, and faculty financial

incentives can considerably task a budget, especially for smaller, non-Research 1 institutions where such programs may not be supported by grants. Fortunately, some of those desirable practices of research and study abroad can be combined and/or facilitated by quality third-party providers. The Pace University Pforzheimer Honors College provides an interesting model in its newly created Pace Global Fellows initiative.

Influenced by a growing body of research establishing the value of study abroad coupled with a knowledge of the value of undergraduate research, honors programs and colleges are seeking ways to stack those opportunities. Pace University Pforzheimer Honors College has launched such a program through a promising partnership with a quality third-party provider, the School for International Training or SIT. This program reflects both an understanding of the impact of study abroad and a recognition of a need to expand that impact. Reviewing the value of that impact is useful to understanding the motivation for the Pace Fellows program.

International education scholar A. Minh Nguyen examines study abroad outcomes in “Transformation through Study Abroad: Critical Thinking and World Citizenship,” reporting that a survey of 3,700 students defined the experience as “life changing,” and the survey respondents told researchers that it provided them with a better understanding of other cultures while increasing their interest in learning and doing well in college. Many students also indicated that the international experience influenced their decision to attend graduate school (Nguyen 22). The author asserts that the world needs a generation of critical thinkers who have international experience equipping them to address the array of serious problems facing today’s societies.

Other major research studies have confirmed the long-term impact of research-based study abroad experiences. The University System of Georgia and other bodies have undertaken substantial assessments of their undergraduates who studied abroad (O’Rear et al.). The SAGE (Study Abroad for Global Engagement) study explored the long-term impact of study abroad on the life choices of alumni from twenty-two different schools (Fry et al.). The Institute

for Educational Study Abroad (IES Abroad) conducted a survey of alumni who had been part of the program over the prior fifty years, exploring impacts on career and educational choices (Dwyer and Peters; Norris and Dwyer). The findings demonstrate that alumni of study abroad programs are more civically engaged on international issues, more likely to practice voluntary simplicity, and significantly more likely to have volunteered and supported organizations devoted to the arts, education, environment, human rights, international development, and social justice than those who did not study abroad. These results all speak to the value of international education.

Yet, despite the confirmed value of study abroad, relatively small numbers of undergraduates participate nationwide. The Institute of International Education (IIE) reports that almost 333,000 undergraduates in the United States studied abroad in 2016–2017, 16% of those earning bachelor's degrees, and 54% of them had done so in Europe (Redden). Pace reports that about 15% of its student body studies abroad. American colleges and universities need to expand access to international experiences for students who will occupy a globalized world upon graduation.

Anthropologist and international specialist Riall W. Nolan shares his concern about the small number of American undergraduates who have the ability or desire to study abroad in “Turning Our Back on the World: Study Abroad and the Purpose of U.S. Higher Education.” Nolan argues, “It’s no longer enough for our students to ‘know the material.’ They need to know what to do with the material in a changing, diverse, and often contradictory global environment” (268). Nolan makes the point that preparation to work in a global context is important to students pursuing any major:

You can be a heck of an engineer, for example, but do you know how to work with the Germans, the Japanese, or the Brazilians to develop the next generation of fuel-efficient vehicle? . . . Individuals who have acquired this ability will have an enormous advantage in the coming years. They will not only be better at dealing with events and situations—they

will be in a better position to shape and direct them from the outset. (268)

Nolan makes the case for the importance of study abroad programs in general, but he emphasizes more immersive ones that significantly acquaint students with different cultures. American students do need to be subject-area experts in their major area of study, but they also need an education that embraces breadth and teaches them to read, think, and communicate critically. It is imperative that they cultivate an awareness of the world around them to better understand global issues. Students need to collaborate with people who are from different backgrounds and have different life experiences. While students obviously need to learn to appreciate the tremendous variety that exists among American college students, they also need to recognize the greater diversity of those in the world around them. Students need to learn other languages, understand other cultures, and learn to collaborate with people with very different life experiences. Study abroad opportunities are an important way to accomplish these goals.

Similarly, international educator James M. Skelly encourages educators to recognize the urgency of developing problem-solving skills in today's young adults. The environment is changing dramatically, and many people agree that current leaders are not doing enough to alleviate the problem of global climate change or other planetary crises. Skelly argues that we need to change the way higher education understands the value of study abroad experiences to produce graduates who ask different questions and consider different evidence to solve intractable problems. He quotes Martha Nussbaum, who argues that "education for world citizenship requires transcending the inclination of both students and educators to define themselves primarily in terms of local group loyalties and identities" (qtd. in Skelly 23). To be global citizens, students need experiences different from those of their homelands that will allow them to appreciate deep differences as well as commonalities. If international education can lead people to respect their shared humanity, they can begin the problem-solving process for complex problems like global warming from a place of greater understanding and less bias. Skelly writes:

This, of course, is where international education can be truly significant. Broadly speaking our efforts are focused on helping individuals to transcend narrow national cultures and identities through the free association of students within a global context. At the same time, we can go several steps further by providing a critical perspective on the imperatives of global corporations and the institutions of states by helping to create a global public sphere where students and faculty, acting as global citizens, can foster much needed debates about international norms on a variety of issues. (27)

Clearly, for decades, the value of study abroad has been validated, and it is currently recognized as one of the most significant of the “high-impact practices” that permeate higher education institutions today (Kuh; Kuh and O’Donnell). Honors educators regularly embed these practices in their academic programs in a variety of ways such as first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, and collaborative assignments, as well as undergraduate research, global learning, service learning, internships, and capstone projects.

Ideally, students experience multiple high-impact practices over the course of their undergraduate years. Combining them is growing in popularity, particularly efforts to combine undergraduate research with study abroad; however, doing so can be labor- and resource-intensive for honors programs and colleges. Consequently, according to the five-year study *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses: 2017 Edition* by the Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement (CIGE) of the American Council of Education, while “[i]n-house models dominate when it comes to resources for internationalization and the management of activities and programs, . . . a notable proportion of institutions are also engaging with outside entities (e.g., third-party program providers, funders, and international partners) to further support and supplement internal efforts” (vii). In fact, numerous outside options align with the goals of honors programs and colleges.

Many universities partner with organizations to provide students with high-quality opportunities to conduct research abroad. EuroScholars pairs undergraduates in the United States and Canada with research faculty at top research universities in Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland. The National Science Foundation's International Research Experiences for Students offers opportunities for students pursuing degrees in science and engineering. As mentioned above, the provider working exceptionally well for the Pace University Pforzheimer Honors College in its quest to offer students the opportunity to undertake research within and beyond the developed world is SIT. To provide a useful example for other honors administrators, details regarding SIT and the Pace University Honors College partnership follow.

The School for International Training (SIT) opened in the 1960s and was affiliated with the Peace Corps. Although its focus has changed over time, SIT retains its commitment to issues of social justice. Students may participate at program sites in Africa, Asia, Australia, Central and South America, and Europe. In fact, SIT organizes over seventy programs where students spend four months in one of the following locations: Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Cameroon, Chile, China, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Ghana, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, The Netherlands, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Rwanda, Samoa, Senegal, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, and Vietnam. (Some of these destinations do include a substantial stay in a secondary location.) Alternatively, SIT also offers eight programs that are based in multiple locations during the course of a semester. These unique SIT programs allow students to study in multiple countries, providing students the opportunity to investigate an issue from different cultural perspectives. SIT's International Honors Programs are a subset of these multi-country programs, where students begin their studies in the United States and spend one month in three additional countries.

SIT semester-long programs provide an unusually immersive experience for American students. Students leave the United States

for four months to study in atypical places. The program includes a homestay for all students. Intensive language training is central to the pedagogy, with students taking language courses for the duration of their program in broadly spoken languages like Arabic and Hindi and less common ones like Icelandic or Mongolian. SIT students also go into the community to conduct research and learn from people in regions of the world not typically credited with being experts like farmers in Africa or healers in India. SIT student research gives voice to those rarely heard and privileges the knowledge of populations who are generally undervalued. If students are going to solve significant global problems, they need to understand that asking the same questions of the same experts is not likely to provide new answers. Problem-solvers of the future must find new ways of answering existing questions and questions we have not yet begun to contemplate. Diversifying the population of people brought into problem-solving conversations is one way to generate new solutions.

Semester-long SIT programs offer students courses around a theme. For instance, those in Mongolia study Nomadism, Geopolitics, and the Environment and take courses in the Mongolian language, Geopolitics and Development Trends, Pastoralism and Natural Resource Management, and Research Methods and Ethics, as well as a course in which they will pursue an independent research project or undertake an internship. The students in The Netherlands focusing on International Perspectives and Gender Identity take courses in Dutch; seminars in Theory and Application of Feminist, Lesbian, and Queer Studies; and Migration, Gender, and Sexuality along with Research Methods and Ethics and a course in which they will produce independent research.

Research is a central part of all SIT programs. The training in research methodology is extensive, and students spend the last month of their program undertaking a research project. (Some students opt for an internship or service project, but most Pace students do research.) Students focus most of their time on gathering data and refining their project while taking an independent study project course. They write papers on different topics such as the public



health challenge of managing tuberculosis or access to reproductive health. Working with a faculty mentor, students determine the parameters of their project. By the program's conclusion, students will have produced a paper and given a presentation about their research. At that point they are prepared to return to the university and to transform their research project into an honors thesis.

The work students in SIT programs undertake abroad is of a different nature from that they could accomplish on campus, and a list of research projects undertaken by SIT students is available on the SIT website at <[https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/do/discipline\\_browser/disciplines](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/do/discipline_browser/disciplines)>. Students have the opportunity throughout their studies and research to speak with a range of people, including government ministers, farmers, or local medical practitioners. Their interactions are enhanced by their experiences in homestays, so they have a deeper appreciation of local culture. Language study provides students with the ability to reach out to people, and translators are provided for students who need to conduct interviews in a language in which they lack mastery. This experience is unique, and one the honors college hopes will allow students a deep understanding of global issues and of the shared qualities of people around the world. The research component should allow students to demonstrate dexterity in their thought process and help them to come to new conclusions about critical questions. The National Collegiate Honors Council speaks of honors programs as incubators of innovation, and in-depth research in a broad range of places with a great diversity of "experts" consulted is indeed an innovation that enriches the experiences of students who go abroad to conduct research as well as the students who remain at their home institutions but who learn from them.

Marianne McGarrity of the SIT Graduate Institute assessed the distinctive experience that SIT students have in "Long-Term Impacts and Outcomes: SIT Study Abroad." McGarrity reached out to over sixteen thousand alumni who were part of SIT over the course of four decades, and 2,107 people responded to her survey. The study examines the long-term impact of study abroad and the career outcomes of students who had participated in SIT programs

(McGarrity 5). McGarrity is particularly interested in assessing the impact of the undergraduate research component of the SIT study abroad curriculum. According to McGarrity, “Ninety percent of respondents indicated that the Independent Study Project (ISP) had a significant impact on their overall study abroad experience. Many alumni specifically mentioned the ISP’s impact and repercussions through graduate school and into their career” (15). She found that a significant percentage of SIT alumni pursued graduate work: 38.9% of respondents had earned a master’s degree (in contrast with 8.05% of the U.S. population over the age of 25), and 10.8% of alumni had earned a PhD or a professional degree (3.07% of the average U.S. population over the age of 25 had). McGarrity does not argue for causality since it is likely that students interested in research at the graduate level would have been attracted to research abroad as undergraduates. SIT seems to have been a program that helped motivated students accomplish research that shaped their future work. In response to the question, “To what extent did your SIT Study Abroad experience influence your career choice?” 72 percent of responses were positive to some or to a large degree. According to McGarrity, “This is significantly higher . . . than the IES alumni study, which reported that 62 percent of alumni had the career direction influenced by study abroad [(Norris and Dwyer) and (Norris and Gillespie), as cited in (Franklin)]; also significantly higher than the SAGE study results, in which 56 percent of respondents indicated that study abroad influenced their career choice (Paige et al.)” Many SIT alumni pursued careers in the public service, education, and non-profit sectors; in fact, 35 percent of alumni stated that they worked in the non-profit or NGO sector.

The Pace Global Fellows Program accommodates students interested in conducting research, undertaking internships, participating in service-learning work, learning the local language, and living with host families abroad. The program serves the needs of students who want to dive deeply into a regional issue from coastal ecology to traditional medicine to refugee and migration studies. The work the students undertake abroad often provides them the

research findings they need to write their honors theses. Partnering with SIT, Pace allows up to ten students per semester to become fellows around the globe, often in uncommon places for study abroad programs. The cost of the program is significant, but usually the expense is less than a semester at Pace would cost a student. Since SIT is defined as a third-party study abroad partner, students pay Pace University tuition and fees, and Pace pays the tuition and fees to SIT, but Pace institutional aid is capped at \$10,000 for third-party partners, and it is possible that a student would be receiving more than this amount. Students pay room and board fees directly to SIT. Given Pace's locations in New York City and Westchester, New York, room and board costs are often considerably less at SIT program sites. The SIT programs are only available to Pace Global Scholars through a rigorous application process that includes essays in which students express their expectations for their personal and academic growth. (A sample application is available in the Appendix.) Students are selected based on their academic performance, maturity, and interest in undertaking a substantial research project.

The Global Fellows Program at Pace University is in its second year and has supported eight students. Honors students have used their research abroad as the foundation of the honors thesis they are required to produce. The SIT program enriches students in three distinct ways: it allows them to learn more about themselves and reach a deeper level of self-fulfillment; it provides them with a laboratory to undertake research to fulfill their honors thesis requirements; and it also prepares them to fulfill post-graduate goals of continuing their education and entering the workforce. The program is demanding, and most of our undergraduates are not up to its challenges. But for those who are accepted into the Pace Global Fellows Program, the rewards are considerable. Since Pace University has just begun sending students on SIT programs, we do not have long-term assessment data, but we have the words of students who recently participated in programs around the world. When the students return to campus, they complete the same evaluation as all study abroad participants. In time a more involved assessment mechanism will be put in place for Pace Global Fellows.

Creating global citizens is important work, and it is difficult work. In partnership with SIT, Pace students have studied in Bolivia, Chile, China, India, Jordan, Tanzania, and Vietnam; one student participated in a multi-site program. The School for International Training provides a range of unique experiences for students that Pace could not provide alone. Local teams know their regions well and orient students within their communities. Students on SIT programs interact with individuals from government officials to local farmers to gain a broad perspective on the communities in which they live. Most Pace Global Fellows can participate in international development work while studying abroad. The academic coursework is challenging, and a central component of it is learning how to conduct research and work within their chosen disciplinary field. Research undertaken by honors students will form the foundation of their theses, which they will finish writing upon their return to the U.S., working with faculty abroad and at Pace.

Recently, a Pace University honors student participated in a semester-long program entitled “Rethinking Food Security: People, Agriculture, and Politics.” She is an environmental science major and used research gathered during the program to frame her honors thesis. She was part of a program that began with students spending two weeks in Berkeley and Santa Cruz, California, where they examined sites of industrial, organic, and urban agricultural production. Along with studying the economy of food, distribution chains, and regulatory directives, the students also engaged in service-learning work that transcended the division between service and research. This student worked alongside farm owners and laborers “in exchange for their knowledge” as she put it. Students worked half days on farms and had more formal conversations with owners and farm laborers at other times. They also worked on the Homeless Garden Project, touring the site and weeding the fields. The Homeless Garden Project is an urban organic farm that hires homeless workers and runs a store in Santa Cruz. The student realized the significance of community in food production: formerly isolated homeless adults were working collaboratively to grow food in high demand by their better-off neighbors and to support a community

agriculture program from which families purchase shares of farm produce. This structure opened the eyes of the students to the connections between communities who own land, grow produce, and transport and sell food and those who consume it.

Once the students left California, they stayed in three different locations, beginning in Ecuador for a month. Ecuador has great agricultural diversity, and the students took excursions to farms where the students worked. The honors student had studied Spanish in high school and through the upper intermediate level in college, and she felt confident in her ability to communicate with the workers and landowners.

After studying in Ecuador, the cohort headed to Malawi for five weeks of study in the capital city and a small town. They focused on food availability and food sovereignty at a time of rapid population growth and climate change. At first, the students studied Chichewa, the local language, met with representatives at the Malawi Ministry of Agriculture, and toured permaculture farms. The next week students traveled to the village of Gowa, where they lived in pairs in homestays to learn about the lives of people in the “global south.” The Pace student clearly pointed out that NGOs and international development agencies target people like those in Gowa when they seek to “fix” global poverty. That policy decisions are made by professionals who have not resided in the regions they seek to assist is not uncommon, and the problems that stem from such decisions were visible to the SIT students. For instance, the honors student pointed to an overdeveloped irrigation scheme and a very hierarchical village structure as hindrances to thoughtful local development. The challenges of finding solutions to difficult problems were readily apparent. The student gained a more nuanced understanding of the community and the complexities of producing food and supplying it to the population because she met with people at the ministry of agriculture as well as local farmers and consumers.

From Africa the students headed to Europe to spend the final portion of the course in Italy, studying food policy and the European Union’s complex system to assure food safety. They learned about Italy’s defined regionalism in food and culture, and they spent

time in Piedmont's Langhe region with family farmers, learning about artisanal production. Students gained a rich understanding of food security from a broad range of perspectives. While the Pace International Office runs an extensive array of programs of different lengths in different parts of the world, it could not coordinate a thematic program like *Rethinking Food Security: People, Agriculture, and Politics*. This example highlights the value that third-party providers like SIT can offer.

One of the students in the food security cohort used this multi-nation experience as the basis for her thesis research. Interested in the impact that national food safety policies and regulations have on smallholder farmers, she used Malawi as one example because food safety policies are not often applied to smallholders in rural areas where the network of regulatory agencies has yet to reach. In contrast to the United States and Ecuador where the cost of organic certification is high, large corporate farms have access to resources to make certification possible, whereas small-scale farmers need to carefully save, plan, and invest in this certification, which makes it difficult for them to compete in a globalized market. She points to the example of Nestle. When Nestle first ventured into Ecuador, the country had lax food production regulations, especially for the dairy industry. When Nestle began to produce to international standards, the Ecuadorian government changed its regulations to reflect those standards. This transformation put many small-scale dairy farmers out of business because they lacked the resources to implement a quick change in production. Her thesis considered how food safety regulations provide an advantage to large-scale international food companies, which could make food production more politically volatile in certain parts of the world. This thesis topic is not one she would have developed by taking courses in New York City. For good reason, most Americans have positive feelings about organic produce and food safety regulations, but her eyes were opened to the complex consequences of regulations, and she was interested in exploring possible solutions in her honors thesis.

Another Pace honors student studying overseas through SIT was a sophomore health sciences major who participated in the India:

Public Health, Gender, and Community Action program in New Delhi. She learned about healthcare policy by visiting rural clinics and urban hospitals and attending lectures delivered by leaders of NGOs and hospitals as well as by physicians. She stated that the most important part of the program was how it has changed the way she perceives the world and how she wants to live in it. The student served as an intern for four weeks at the Center for Biofield Sciences in Goa to study the body's bio-energy systems and how they relate to yoga, acupuncture, and other Eastern healing practices. The student began teaching yoga at the age of seventeen when she was in high school. Before attending Pace, she was interested in connections between medical practice and spiritualism; now she will have the ability to intern in a place that is working to map human energy to use technology to provide a more holistic approach to healthcare. The SIT program allowed her to research non-Western medicine in much more depth than if she had remained enrolled in classes in Pace's health science curriculum. Her work as an intern translated into the basis of her honors thesis.

Of course, most honors programs require students to do substantial undergraduate research. SIT offers a unique path that allows students to have intensive research experiences as part of an immersive international experience. Immersive international education enriches the profile of undergraduate research on campus and makes international projects more meaningful and more accessible to students. At Pace University, the honors college wants to normalize international educational experiences as much as it desires to normalize meaningful undergraduate research. Pace Global Fellows have the opportunity to develop thesis projects beyond what would be possible if they conducted their research only in New York.

Since this program is in a fledging state, detailed assessment data are not yet available; however, thus far, in addition to student-reported satisfaction, the program is yielding positive results in a variety of ways. For example, the Pace Global Fellows Program prepares students to apply for prestigious fellowships. For instance, a Pell-eligible student was interested in study abroad. She was awarded a Gilman Scholarship that funded her research



study in Bolivia, where she examined female genital mutilation as part of SIT's "Multiculturalism, Globalization, and Social Change" program. Upon her return to Pace, she applied for and earned a Jeannette Watson Fellowship, which supports summer internships with non-profits and governments, to allow her to work in areas aligned with her majors of political science and peace and justice studies. The student became the first from Pace University to be named a Truman Scholar, which provides a \$30,000 scholarship for graduate study. The university is developing a pipeline for students who are interested in applying for prestigious awards, many of which support international education.

In other words, the value of the SIT programs extends beyond the students' tenure at Pace. Several students see the international experience enriching their experiences and making them better prepared for government careers. For example, one student who enrolled in SIT Study Abroad Jordan: Geopolitics, International Relations, and the Future of the Middle East plans to pursue a career in intelligence in the United States and is spending the semester engaged in learning modern standard Arabic in the classroom while using the language in a homestay and as an intern. The student is pursuing a major in computer science and cybersecurity and plans to combine this with his training in Arabic to understand and combat ISIS's use of mobile applications. Another student, who wants to work for the Department of State, is studying economic development and social transformation in Vietnam and will use the independent research project to learn more about foreign policy programs and their impact on that country.

The Pace Global Fellows Program clearly enriches the students' undergraduate experience and beyond. The program is helping to create global thinkers and engaged citizens: students with vision and desire to change the world by working with governmental agencies or NGOs or by attending graduate school to gain further expertise. The value of linking undergraduate research with study abroad, especially by taking advantage of resource-rich providers like SIT, creates the opportunity for multi-pronged experiences for honors students that are impossible for most institutions to provide



independently. Bundling high-impact practices and drawing upon outside support to do so potentially yield rich rewards for individual students, our institutions, and our society at-large.

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**APPENDIX****Sample Pace Global Fellows Application****Statement of Purpose Essay**

The Statement of Purpose Essay is your chance to personalize your application. When composing the Statement of Purpose Essay, it is important to address the impact the Pace Global Fellows program will have on your academic, professional, and personal goals. Some key points to keep in mind are: why do you wish to participate in the Pace Global Fellows program? What do you hope to gain from this experience? How will learning the local language and living in a homestay affect your study abroad experience? Why have you chosen your country of study? What factors led you to select this program's coursework and location? How will this study abroad program and the coursework you take abroad impact your academic and future professional goals? How will this study abroad program impact your degree at Pace upon your return to campus? What are ways in which you can share this experience with others?

**Pace Global Fellows Program Application Process**

Pace Global Fellows Program space is limited, which makes approval to participate a competitive process.

Applicants will be subject to the minimum admissions requirements as established by each specific program (see program brochure page for eligibility requirements).

When more applications are received than Pace Global Fellows Program space permits, preference in application selection will go to, in no particular order:

1. Students who plan to apply to a National Undergraduate Student Scholarship program in connection to their selected study abroad program (see the "National Undergraduate Student Scholarships" Questionnaire).
2. As evidenced in the Student Statement of Purpose, students who:
  - a. Demonstrate the adaptability and flexibility needed to successfully navigate living and studying in another country.
  - b. Show a willingness to learn a new language and/or improve their existing foreign language skills.
  - c. Establish a connection between study abroad program coursework and future Pace Honors thesis work and/or Independent Study/Research in their major.

Applications for the Pace Global Fellows program are reviewed following the posted Pace University study abroad application deadline. Applicants will be notified via email by the posted decision date regarding selection decision/next steps in the application process.