

# AWAY

TOPICS

Higher Education  
Abroad and Complex  
Accommodations  
Issue

A World Awaits You

[www.miusa.org/ncde](http://www.miusa.org/ncde)

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Vicky Chen

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## Deaf Students Abroad



**W**hen Barbara Hammer, Director of Disability Services at the University of Missouri, learned a Deaf student planned to study in Australia, she took action. Collaborating with campus partners and local interpreters, the university sent two American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters abroad with the student at a reasonable cost.

Did you know

Sign language differs from country to country.

Why is Deaf often capitalized

It represents someone who identifies as culturally Deaf.

Sending ASL interpreters abroad is only one option to provide equal opportunities to study abroad for Deaf students. Some Deaf or Hard of Hearing individuals communicate very effectively by using speech, their residual hearing, and hearing aids. Others require additional visual cues, such as speech-to-text services (e.g. CART, TypeWell, C-Print). Knowing what service to provide in a specific setting - information that can be gathered in advance through dialogue with the student and in accommodation forms - will determine what will be most effective.

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## Deaf Students Abroad

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CDS International, an exchange organization that administers the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange for Young Professionals program, and their partner organization in Germany purchased an FM assistive listening system for Rachel Munis, an American hard of hearing student, for use during language school and the university phase of the program. “I had the opportunity to see Rachel in Cologne, and she was doing wonderfully,” says Will Maier, CDS Program Officer.



For best practices on funding and answers to logistical questions, go to *Deaf and Hard of Hearing International Exchange Participants* at:

[www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/deafservicesoverseas](http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/deafservicesoverseas)



## Editor's Corner

When we ask the question: “Have you had students with disabilities?” of our education abroad colleagues, each year more people have success stories to tell.

We also learn of situations where “in the end” a student with a disability was not able to go abroad. Whether real or perceived barriers, we often find that other creative ideas could have resulted in a different outcome for the student, providing the same opportunity as his or her peers to a life-changing international experience.

We work in a field that has the can-do and cross-cultural perspectives to successfully navigate barriers. Time and again I have seen resistance and fear mitigated with a mix of advocacy, diplomacy, education and planning. In today's world of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, attitudinal barriers should not be stopping any student with a disability from being able to participate. Allies and peers with disabilities can be found in every culture in every country.

This *AWAY Topics* focuses on issues of complex accommodation barriers and our responsibility as a community to create inclusive programs. To remove policy, financial, attitudinal and legal barriers, we need more people in the education abroad fields to evaluate current practices and work towards systemic changes. Together, we can make a difference!

Cerise Roth-Vinson  
Chief Operating Officer, Mobility International USA

## Featured Student:

### Vicky Chen

**Disability:** Low Vision

**Student:** University of California, Berkeley

**Exchange:** Six-Week Language Program in Taiwan



**Why did you decide to study abroad?**

I got a brochure in the mail, and since Chinese is potentially a very useful language to know, I thought “Why not?” So I applied and got accepted.

**What was the process to arrange accommodations on your study abroad program?**

There was a lot more negotiating involved than I was expecting. I went on a summer program, and the staff had not previously worked with anyone with a visual impairment. The university that they were working with in Taiwan didn’t want me to go because they were afraid it might harm their good reputation if anything bad happened. I heard a lot of “We’re not sure if they can give you that. That either. What if they can’t do that?”

I talked with the program staff, the professor going with the students to Taiwan, and also referred them to my counselor at the disabled students’ office at UC Berkeley. Being able to sit down and talk about the concerns that different people had, and how they could be worked around, created a generally encouraging atmosphere.

**What were academic accommodations like abroad?**

I researched where to find a disabilities department at my university in Taiwan. They had one, but I was referred to a center specifically for visual impairments in another school. This center supplied equipment to students in all the different colleges across Taiwan, and they loaned me the magnification equipment for free. They were really excited to have someone with a visual impairment from outside the country.

**How did you get around in Taiwan?**

Locating food was really easy in Taiwan because you could live off the 7 Eleven and there was always one around every corner. Getting around Taiwan though was definitely a lot more challenging than in the United States because the sidewalks are broken and neither traffic nor people follow the traffic signals. I mostly traveled either with someone on the program or a Taiwanese student assistant the program hired for me.

**What were the disability-related cultural differences you noticed between the U.S. and Taiwan?**

On campuses in Taiwan, the students with minor visual impairments usually prefer to hide it. People are willing to help, but they are also not as outgoing about asking you if you need assistance. Telling people what I wanted made a big difference. A lot of people in Taiwan use English, but trying to express myself in Chinese greatly improved my foreign language skills.



Learn about *Accessing Foreign Language Materials as a Blind or Low Vision Student* at: [www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/languageguide](http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/languageguide)

## Beyond Screening, Toward Planning

In the education abroad field, screening out individuals that may not be ready to go abroad is a common response to having experienced crisis situations. Education abroad professionals will often screen students for indicators such as mental health issues. Yet a mental health condition does not indicate a student will have a crisis abroad and that other students will not.

“An organization can require qualifications that are genuinely necessary for participation in the overseas program. However, a decision on this point must be made reasonably and soundly, free of stereotypes and unsupported biases,” points out Silvia Yee from the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund. “The organization’s medical officers or staff cannot simply ‘feel’ that the applicant’s mental health disability, or history of treatment, including medication or hospitalization, may cause a problem abroad.” Non-discrimination laws require that individuals be evaluated on a case by case basis.

Screening is also not a substitute for planning. All students, regardless of medical or disability history, will benefit from risk management planning. Instead of generalizing or predicting whether or not a student will succeed overseas based on their medical history or waiting for students to disclose, education abroad providers can be proactive by planning.

Examples of how programs and institutions are building mental health services and information into their orientations and on-site support include:

- Sharing a list of accepted participants with the disability services office and the counseling center on campus so advisors in those offices can work directly with their students who are going abroad.
- Providing information to all students and program staff about mental health-related resources, such as counselors and support groups in the host country.
- Offering mental health coverage to all participants as a supplement to their insurance plan.
- Making sure that all students know the program’s conduct codes and consequences, and supporting the staff in how to enforce these policies.
- Training overseas staff and/or faculty to recognize and support a student experiencing a mental health-related issue, whether related to an existing diagnosis or condition, or one manifesting for the first time.
- Talking with students with disclosed mental health-related disabilities about what reasonable accommodations can be provided and asking returned students about their experiences to see what is working and what could be improved.



Learn more in the *Screening: Implications for College and University Students with Disabilities in Education Abroad* tipsheet online at:

[www.miusa.org/ncde/tools/screening](http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tools/screening)



## Student Medical Insurance

For students with disabilities, getting the individual travel health insurance coverage they need can be difficult if they have pre-existing or chronic conditions.

Also, Medicaid does not travel abroad and students on this program often do not qualify for similar coverage from the host country. This creates a barrier to study abroad for those who use personal assistants. Do you know if your students are deciding not to go or going underinsured because of these barriers?

Due to repeated requests by resident staff and institutional partners, Council on International Educational Exchange began offering \$10,000 worth of mental health coverage in their iNEXT “accident and sickness” supplementary insurance plan provided to all participants. Students now have another resource to utilize to assist them, and resident staff will no longer be the sole providers of “counseling” services to students. The feedback has been positive.

Remind your students to check if their existing coverage goes abroad and consider group coverage options for all students! Group coverage only provides reassurance to a certain extent - you must also negotiate for a group policy with pre-existing and mental health coverage options. This can include:

- Reduction in the exclusion time period that defines pre-existing conditions,
- Coverage of all pre-existing and/or mental health conditions,

- Coverage exceptions in emergencies to stabilize the individual, or
- Medication coverage if it remains controlled without any change.



The costs of covering pre-existing conditions can be affordable. Read more information on *Insurance Considerations for Exchange Participants with Disabilities* at:

[www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/insurance](http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/insurance)



### HIV/AIDS: International Exchange Planning



Find a country’s laws pertaining to people living with HIV/AIDS, relevant organizations within the country for support, success stories, and resources on HIV/AIDS terminology and health planning abroad:

[www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/hiv](http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/hiv)

## Five Tips from Colleagues about Changing Your Institutional Process

- 1 Secure institutional buy-in at the senior leadership level; reference mission statements and policies that affirm values for diversity and global experiences for all students.
- 2 Agree in advance with overseas partners, study abroad consortiums, disability services, third party providers and/or host universities how accommodations will be funded.
- 3 Research services which are portable overseas (e.g. vocational rehabilitation funds, remote interpreting, etc.) or available overseas to directly enrolled students, and what changes to the host site could also potentially benefit future local and international students with disabilities.
- 4 Include a non-discrimination clause for people with disabilities in partner agreements; state that there is an expectation to assist in exploring what can be provided and that the U.S. institution is committed to allowing students with disabilities to participate.
- 5 Discuss gaps or differences between home campus and education abroad program policies (e.g. insurance, conduct, etc.) and what can be done to better align these.

## Publisher's Notes

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# From the Field:

## Student Advice for Education Abroad Advisors

“ When the person with a disability travels, he or she is going to encounter every kind of situation. So there’s no point in tiptoeing around political correctness - don’t be really invasive, but if this person has never traveled before, he or she is going to have to think about every possibility that could occur or even about his or her own disability. Get all the information out on the table.

I can say, absolutely, that traveling in developing countries is far easier than traveling in the western world because people will be your assistive device. There is willingness and that attitudinal accessibility makes it so much easier. I went on a six day trek in the Himalayas without my wheelchair. That would never happen in America or the western concept of accessibility.”

*Megan Smith, power wheelchair user who volunteered abroad in Costa Rica and Nepal, and studied abroad in Spain*



“ Before going I would like to meet with a professor leading a program abroad and see how he relates to my disability. If he has a negative attitude, I know that my experience could be harder and it would be a personal decision whether I wanted to do it anyway or not. Some people would still go for it; others might seek someone with a more positive attitude. My program director was very laid back. Being encouraging and having an optimistic attitude is very important.

Most people with disabilities have experienced advocating for themselves. Some people have done it their whole lives. You can help by asking, ‘Are you okay with having to figure out things and be creative when you’re over there?’”

*Haben Girma, a deaf-blind student who has done exchanges to Mali and Costa Rica and traveled to Italy and Greece*