

AWAY

TOPICS

Disability and Higher
Education Abroad
Issue

A World Awaits You

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Accessing the World: How Disability Providers Can Make it Happen

When Megan Smith volunteered in Nepal, she didn't realize to what extent electricity, necessary for powering up her wheelchair, was unreliable. Thinking quickly, she ordered a generator from India. The type of disability accommodations people with disabilities receive at home are likely very different from what they can expect in another country, so flexibility, creativity and a sense of adventure is necessary. Just like in the United States, access varies from place to place and adaptive technology may uniquely fit the needs of the local disability community. "Navigating our way through Tokyo, Japan made for unforgettable adventures," says Janie Mejias, who has

cerebral palsy and uses a power wheelchair. "When we entered the train station and could only locate an escalator, we asked where we could find an elevator. When the station manager said 'The escalator is

wheelchair accessible,' a panic stricken look came across my face as I envisioned myself trying to use the escalator in my power wheelchair! But I soon learned that my fears were unfounded. With the touch of a button a few stairs of the escalator were transformed into a flat platform with guard rails surrounding it allowing wheelchairs to safely and easily be transported."



When an American student who is blind and used a cane to navigate applied

(continued on page 3)



A publication of the
National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange

Editor's Corner

Some students apply at the last minute to go abroad, and others take up to two years to plan. Students with disabilities that do neither and stay home may be missing out on a chance to experience the benefits of an international education.

Many students with disabilities have challenged themselves and proved they can figure out barriers when they happen and have a successful experience abroad, just like their peers. Disability service professionals, in contact with students with disabilities each day, play an important role to connect students with international exchange opportunities.

This issue of the *AWAY Topics* looks at ways disability providers can break down barriers by collaborating with education abroad and international student offices on campus, so more people with disabilities can become world citizens, and, in doing so, strengthen cross-border collaborations in achieving positive changes for people with disabilities worldwide.

Cerise Roth-Vinson
Chief Operating Officer, Mobility International USA

Did you know:

Only one third of Americans over age 18 hold a passport?



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Five Ways to Use the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange

- 1 Link to the Going Abroad webpage with access to the full chapters of *Survival Strategies for Going Abroad: A guide for people with disabilities*.
www.miusa.org/ncde/goingabroad
- 2 Send international students with disabilities interested in coming to the United States to the webpage on this topic.
www.miusa.org/ncde/comingtousa
- 3 Read the online blogs and stories by people with disabilities who went abroad and request that NCDE staff follow up with students on your campus to get their experiences published.
www.miusa.org/ncde/stories
- 4 Discover practical tips for students with various types of disabilities on international exchange programs.
www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets
- 5 Contact the NCDE staff with specific questions about study abroad or international students with disabilities or other related initiatives to receive free customized referrals and suggestions.
www.miusa.org/ncde/aboutncde/infoquestionnaire

Accessing the World

(continued from page 1)

to study in Rome, Italy, Duke University's Disability Services Coordinator, Jim Baker, assessed the impact of the student's disability and concerns. What he and the student identified were:

- Classroom access to materials
- Access to classroom buildings
- Use of public transportation
- Visits to ancient sites in Rome and on fields trips to other areas in Italy
- Program concerns for blind students from Rome program coordinators
- Medical insurance coverage
- Personal safety
- Need for a personal assistant

None of the needs were insurmountable if resolved one by one by reaching out to all the stakeholders ranging from overseas local contacts to disability services colleagues and specialists, the study abroad office, and the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange.

Building a relationship between the Disability Services office and the study abroad office is essential. "There are certainly times when there are students who are availing themselves of services but are not disclosing their disability to the study abroad staff, and sometimes I'm coordinating with the student to provide campus-based services that they get even while abroad," says Laura Patey, Coordinator of Disability Services at Lesley University. "[Other times] there would be students that I would be seeing on a fairly regular basis and I'd get the student study abroad list and say, 'I didn't know you will be studying



abroad' because it wouldn't necessarily be part of our conversation. The student would say, 'Oh, I didn't even think about it or that you could help me with that.'" Requesting a list of accepted study abroad students from the study abroad office each term helped her identify and advise more students, and maintain comprehensive, accurate records.

International Students

International students coming to the United States can be just as surprised with the accessibility differences. When Brigitte Mensah, a blind attorney in Cote d'Ivoire, arrived in Eugene, Oregon as a participant on the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, she learned about a range of accessibility

tools available to her. Mensah was used to having an assistant read and scribe all her correspondence and someone to guide her, which she was initially provided. To become more independent by U.S. standards, she received support from the university's adaptive technology center to learn screen-reading software, and the disability services office assisted her in finding orientation and mobility training in the community that was paid by her sponsored program.

Disability services professionals can benefit from cross-trainings with the international student office to learn cultural implications of student behaviors that may develop. It may be necessary to approach the student about disability issues in a different way, encourage self-advocacy skills, describe disabilities that may not have been diagnosed at home, or explain privacy and confidentiality standards, especially if students arrive in the U.S. unfamiliar with their rights or lacking the tools to share their needs and concerns.

Yasushi Miyazaki, who is a Japanese graduate student on the autism spectrum, attended Syracuse University in New York. "I went to the Office of Disability Services and asked to arrange for a letter requesting professors be tolerant of my difficulty in oral communication due to autism and second-language mastery. Sometimes I felt isolated during the class, because I could not understand discussions. So, I set up a goal: Speak up at least once per class. Then, I realized that professors and my classmates valued my participation." Through a student disability advocacy group on campus, he "learned a lot about advocacy practice and how much people can help each other in a community."

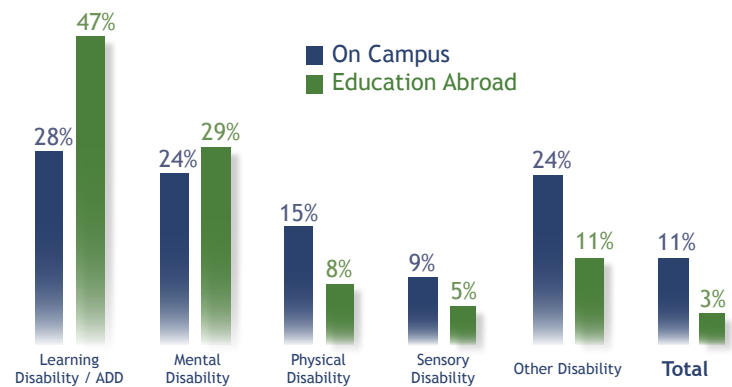
"One important lesson learned about welcoming foreign students with disabilities at campuses here in the United States is to position our mindset in a place that starts with 'How can we make this work?' rather than 'I don't think this can work!'," says Stephan Hamlin-Smith, Executive Director of the Association on Higher Education And Disability. "Another valuable lesson is to be as prepared as possible - research, ask questions, find out as much as possible in advance of the new student's arrival."



Learn best practices from other disability services offices and suggestions on how to collaborate with study abroad and international student offices. Go to:

www.miusa.org/ncde/tools/bestpractices and www.miusa.org/ncde/away

Students with attention, learning and mental health-related disabilities are choosing to study abroad at greater rates than post-secondary students with other disabilities.



Source: Open Doors Survey on International Educational Exchange (2009), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education (2008)

Featured Person:

Franz Knupfer

Disability:

Deaf

Exchange:



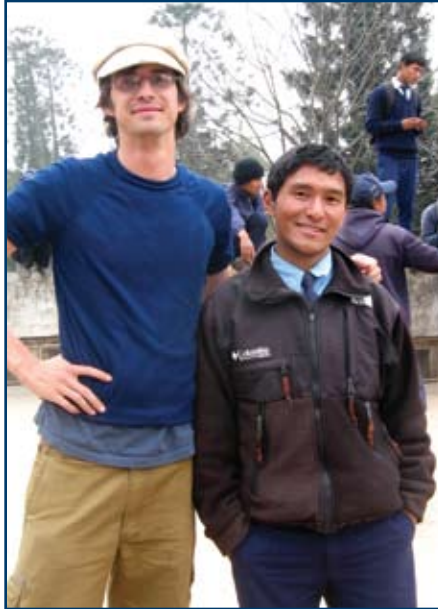
Fulbright Student Program to Nepal

How did you learn about the Fulbright program?

I had this perception that the Fulbright was an incredibly competitive grant that sent students to Europe to study at schools covered with ivy. I learned much more about the Fulbright program, and dispelled many of my misperceptions, while a graduate student in the Master's of Fine Arts (MFA) program at Johns Hopkins University. I had an encouraging Fulbright Program Advisor there who was very helpful with my application.

What motivated you to take the next steps and apply?

To me, the Fulbright was the perfect opportunity to combine writing, travel abroad and service. When I began to realize the kinds of things I could do in Nepal, I became really excited and it was homing in on Nepal that really motivated me to take the next step.



What resources did you find most useful when preparing your application?

I found the Fulbright website to be useful for the initial process. I found several projects working with the Deaf community in Nepal, so I got in touch with previous grantees. I also got in touch with U.S. non-profits who were working with people who are Deaf and others with disabilities in Nepal.

What was interview process like for you?

Though the Fulbright Program Advisor and professors certainly challenged me with the questions they asked, trying to find weaknesses in my application, I felt that they were doing this in a supportive, instructive way. I'm an excellent lip-reader and I also use a hearing aid and cochlear implant, so I didn't need any special resources for communication access. Just being in a small group setting was enough for me.

Tell us about an experience during your Fulbright program in Nepal.

It was incredibly rewarding to get to know so many students at the Naxal School for the Deaf in Kathmandu. I taught art to students who are Deaf for several months and it was trial by fire since I was just beginning to learn Nepali Sign Language. But I loved the kids and loved inspiring them. I also taught American Sign Language to older students later in the year and that was just as rewarding. Having a service element to my project was so important. It plugged me into the community, gave me a sense of purpose, and provided material for my stories. You can read more about it on my blog at: <http://deafnepal.blogspot.com>.



To learn more about the Fulbright program go to: www.miusa.org/ncde/fulbright

Finding Study Abroad Funding

Financial assistance for studying abroad comes most often from the efforts of an individual applying for scholarships, obtaining loans and fundraising. For students with disabilities, school administrators can play an important role in assisting a student with funding that can be used to offset prohibitive costs related to disability accommodations.

“A student should just get to go overseas and be a student, instead of struggling to find ways to get their accommodation needs met,” says Jim Kessler, Director of Disability Services at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. “We need others to tell our story. The ‘we’ becomes the university, not just the disability service office or the students. If the university is pushing for globalization efforts this is great. What about students with disabilities?” He has been able to get support of the university’s senior leadership, use an endowment fund, and work with the university’s development department to find donors



to support an advising position in the study abroad office to assist students with disabilities planning to study abroad.

“When the UK’s Disability Discrimination Act IV made it clear that institutional obligations covered education-related costs for international students, even though there was no government funding for them since they don’t qualify for Disabled Student Allowances, the most sensible institutions budgeted from their international fees income to create a fund which could be used to cover reasonable adjustments for international students,” says Deb Viney, Diversity Advisor, School of Oriental and African Studies in London, England.

Other than academic accommodations, students with disabilities also should investigate whether other disability-related needs, such as personal assistants, will also be covered when abroad. When advising students, disability providers can offer the following advice:

1 Review the funding sources being used at home and how they can be applied abroad:

- Government Disability Pensions or Medical Benefits - In the United States this includes Social Security benefits which can be maintained while studying abroad; Medicaid usually does not apply abroad. Also, non-U.S. citizens studying in the U.S. are not eligible for these benefits, but may be able to maintain similar sources of support from home.
- Educational Funding - In the United States this includes Vocational Rehabilitation funding which can apply to study abroad programs as part of a career goal or degree requirement. Similarly

the GI Bill provides tuition and fees for U.S. veterans under certain stipulations. International students enrolled via a federal or foundation sponsored program may have funds set aside to accommodate disability-related needs.

2 Learn about international scholarships with diversity or disability as a specific goal:

- Federal or Embassy scholarships, such as the Fulbright or Gilman Programs
- Foundations scholarships, such as the Rotary Ambassadorial or Ford Fellowship Programs
- Scholarships offered by disability or service organizations that can also be used for international purposes, such as the American Council of the Blind or Lion and Kiwanis clubs
- University Scholarships, which international students can learn about through EducationUSA or American students through study abroad offices.

3 Think critically about cost-savings by what type of program is chosen:

- Lower cost programs, such as community college, volunteer abroad or summer exchanges
- Programs with many partners involved to share the cost, such as consortium or third party programs
- Programs that provide living stipends/salaries or lodging with host families, such as teaching English or interning abroad.



Learn about these options in further detail at the NCDE's Funding Questions webpage: www.miusa.org/ncde/financialaid

Of several hundred college students with disabilities surveyed who have studied or plan to study abroad, a fifth use disability supports often or very often.

Source: National Survey on Student Engagement (2006)

Publisher's Notes



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From the Field:

“Many international students are not familiar with U.S. disability culture and therefore do not know what services are available to them. We can work with international student advisors to help international students with disabilities feel comfortable asking for resources available – to walk and talk them through whatever needs they have.”

Carla Dodge, Access Advisor at Johnson Community College in Missouri, USA.



“Being an international student living in another country is not easy; being a disabled person who gets around on crutches, like me, can make it even more challenging. Using an electronic wheelchair was the most comfortable way around the campus, since I could go independently from one building to another. A university access guide and other assistance for students with disabilities were provided by the university’s Disability Resources for Students office. I made gains every day in navigating the campus and my studies.”

Sophak Kanika Nguon, a woman with a physical disability from Cambodia, who studied for a master’s degree in Washington, USA.

“Like many people with chronic illnesses, I sometimes shy away from otherwise rewarding experiences because I worry about my health in unfamiliar situations.

This was one of the reasons I chose a summer program; it was only 2 months in duration. I knew I could handle that. It’s also important to have a sense of humor, a strong sense of self, and a willingness to do things differently than other people.”

Sarah Franz, a Deaf graduate student with chronic conditions, who previously studied abroad in Italy and Costa Rica on summer programs.

“I consider my trip to France a very significant accomplishment on my part. Although it is sometimes hard for people with Asperger’s to accept change, I was able to travel to a different country and become more fluent in another language, many miles away from my parents. Even though my Asperger’s syndrome gives me the tendency to be somewhat introverted, I felt that my time in France communicating in a different language and learning about another country gave me a greater desire to interact with others and experience new cultures in the future.”

Chris Tidmarsh, a U.S. student with Asperger’s who studied in France on a college program.