



Resilience Beyond Borders: Practical Strategies to Support Neurodiverse Students Abroad

Stephanie Rock
Dean of Students



Introduction

- She/Her
- Dean of Students
 - 20th year working to accommodate students going abroad
 - 23+ years in Student Affairs
- Mom of two neurodiverse kids
 - Son, 12, autism (level 2) and ADHD
 - Behavioral management at school and home
 - Therapy providers-speech, OT, ABA, CBT
 - Experience navigating the IEP and evaluation process
 - Medication journey
 - Daughter, 6, starting a psychological evaluation
- First time attendee at AHEAD
- Studied abroad in Venezuela in 2001
- Advocate of intercultural competence and developing a global perspective

IES Abroad



- Since 1950
- More than 140 programs in 30 locations
- Not-for-profit
- 11,000+ students abroad annually
- Academic Consortium of 275+ US Colleges and Universities

Neurodiversity



“Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.

The word neurodiversity refers to the diversity of all people, but it is often used in the context of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as other neurological or developmental conditions such as ADHD or learning disabilities.”

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-neurodiversity-202111232645>

IES Abroad & Disabilities

- ALL students must submit a disability accommodation request form.
- Disability grant up to \$2500 available by application for students who will incur additional expense to accommodate a disability.
- We ask for a letter from the home institution outlining eligible accommodations.
- Accommodations are based on eligible accommodations at the home institution.
- Robust insurance plan that covers pre-existing conditions, counseling.
- Onsite and Chicago-based staff to support students.



Study Abroad as an Opportunity

- Gain experience with self-advocacy
- Enhance problem-solving skills
- Opportunity to immerse in an area of interest
- Develop a global perspective
- Grow self-awareness and self-acceptance
- Cultural Immersion
- Career Advancement



Study Abroad Expects Students to. . .

- Develop new routines with unfamiliar resources
- Adapt to uncertainty
- Manage their own health
- Manage their time with less structure
- Communicate across cultures
- Live in smaller spaces with fewer amenities
- Build new social connections
- Navigate different academic format and expectations
- Communicate in an unfamiliar language
- Take public transportation
- Thrive away from familiar support structures
- Solve problems independently
- Be flexible

Challenges Abroad for Neurodiverse Students

- Health & Well-Being
 - Managing medication
 - Arranging similar medical and therapy providers
- Housing
 - Realistic expectations of host, not as a care giver
 - Smaller housing spaces or inability to have a single room
- Academic
 - Attendance requirement
 - The avoidance spiral
 - Executive functioning struggle
- Daily Living
 - Isolation and burnout
 - Missed social cues
 - Stigma or lack of understanding around neurodiversity
 - Sensory overload



What would you add?

Study Abroad is not One-Size-Fits-All

- Program Format
 - Stand Alone/Cohort
 - Hybrid
 - Direct Enrollment
- Length of program
 - Semester-long
 - Summer
 - Short-term customized
- Location and local culture
 - Weather
 - Local culture and attitude toward neurodiversity
 - Availability of resources
 - Small City vs Major Metropolis
 - Walking vs. public transportation
 - A lot of activity vs. free time
- Housing Options
 - Living with US or international students
 - Single or double rooms
 - Host families
 - With or without kitchen access



Medication Abroad



In most countries, the most widely utilized ADHD medication in the US is not available to be prescribed. Penalties vary by country.



Students may plan ahead and work with their provider to determine availability and legality of medication. In most cases they can bring a full supply with them with proper planning but varies by country.



Recommendation: Plan early, work with your prescriber months in advance



Local provider may be able to write a prescription for a similar medication.

Pre-Departure Considerations

Is this the best time to go abroad?

- Stable medications (if applicable)
- Reasonable success on campus
- Strong motivation to go abroad

Is the program an appropriate length

Rigor of the predeparture process challenges executive functioning

- Application/rigorous visa process
- Planning for medication, budget, schedule

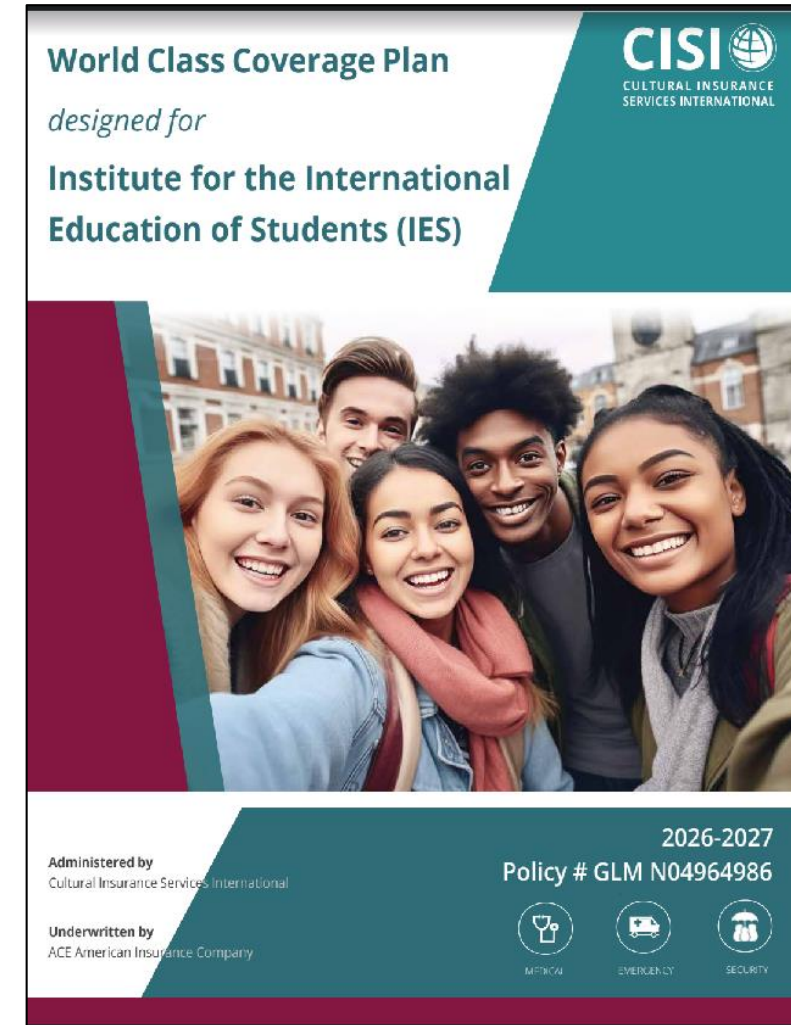
Planning for sensory needs abroad

Attendance at virtual predeparture orientation sessions to reduce unknowns

Review of the course syllabus

Support System Planning

- Can a US-based existing therapist continue treating the student through telehealth while abroad?
 - What insurance will apply to this?
 - Will the provider be able to treat through telehealth outside of their state?
 - Does the provider have resources to offer to the student to see a neurodiverse-informed provider?
- What is the process to see a doctor who can prescribe psychotropic medication? Will the insurance cover this expense?
- Does the student depend on other informal support on campus, can this access travel with them abroad? Can they continue having coaching meetings?
- Is the student's family support structure critical to their success on campus?
- Is this their first time living in program/campus housing?



Realistic Expectations for Students & Families

Red Flag A parent calls to inquire:

- Will someone pick them up/help them to go back and forth to class?
- The host family let my student oversleep and he missed class this morning.

The Expectation: The student needs to be able to function independently or have appropriate support accommodations in place to help them function.

Red Flag: A student asks to be waived from a core academic component of the program (e.g. language instruction).

The Expectation: If language instruction is a core academic component of the program, it may not be waived. Other accommodations may be possible.

Red Flag: Student cannot articulate why they want to go abroad.

The Expectation: Struggle is inevitable. When the newness of being abroad transitions to the inevitable challenges, lack of motivation may threaten the student's resilience.

Small Group Discussion Considerations

- How do you set realistic expectations for a student going abroad?
- Do you have a process/system of collaboration on campus with your study abroad office?
- Do your students abroad continue to receive access to support from your office while abroad? Is this contingent on the type of program they are on?
- Do you encourage students to seek out study abroad opportunities?

Strategies for Success Abroad: Be Realistic



- Do not expect the change in environment to change who you are or your typical outcomes.
- Link: SNL Skit: [Adam Sandler Romano Tours SNL Skit](#)

Nuts & Bolts: Preparing to go abroad

- Will the program or provider seek to provide similar accommodations to what the student receives on campus?
- Encourage the student to submit accommodation requests early.
- Does the program offer housing that aligns with the student's needs? If not, can the student arrange their own housing?
- Will the student take courses with a US-based provider or with a partner institution, which may be subject to their own governance with accommodations.
- Aside from formal accommodations, encourage the student to consider what informal structures, tools, resources, help them be successful now. How will this be managed while abroad?
- Check on medication availability and guidance for traveling with medication.
- Encourage student to be aware of policies in advance related to withdrawal, refund, early departure, academic accommodations implementation, academic discipline, student conduct procedures.

Pair & Discuss: A Case Study Abroad

Teddy is a student who receives academic accommodations and is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD and anxiety. Teddy shared his academic accommodation requests for extended test time, reduced distraction testing environment and flexible deadlines but did not disclose his diagnosis on a medical report. Teddy could not bring a full supply of his medication, which is not available in country. Teddy has been given resources to arrange to see a local provider but has not yet taken the steps to obtain medication and declines offers of assistance. Teddy has run out of medication. Teddy lives in the program's only housing option, which is housing in shared apartments, in a single room, with local, mixed-gender students as the flatmates. Flatmates are complaining to Teddy about his lack of cleanliness, based on local standards.

On paper Teddy has a high GPA on campus and functions well. However, since his arrival abroad he has struggled with class attendance. Teddy is at risk of facing academic disciplinary action. There are several program-arranged field study trips integrated into the program and Teddy struggles to function on the trips. Staff feel a high level of responsibility for him and they find he struggles to manage to meet up with the group at the planned time and location. He is also not well-integrated with other students so he is often on his own. Teddy also has been feeling overwhelmed and is not functioning at the level he does on campus. Teddy does not want to involve his family.

What would you want the program provider to do to help Teddy? If this happened on campus, what would you do? What support might Teddy need to be able to be successful?

Thoughts? Questions?

Stephanie Rock, MS
srock@iesabroad.org
312.264.5119