

Show Me the Money!

Study Abroad Funding and the Diversification of Institutional Support

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Tags

Education Abroad; Education Policy; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; Management and Operations; Student Services; University/Higher Education

Setting

The University of Majesty is a public 4-year institution with 4,000 undergraduate students and 750 graduate students. Ten percent of the student body is from underrepresented socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. Of the nearly 5,000 students, only about 500 receive federal and state financial aid. Longitudinal studies and surveys from the Office of Admissions reveal that the opportunity to study abroad as an undergraduate is a primary factor in students' decision to attend the University of Majesty. Most of the study abroad opportunities are led by faculty throughout Europe during the summer. Most of the overall financial support from the institution is merit-based.

Case

Jerry Jenkins enrolled at the University of Majesty. As a first-year student, he was excited to begin college, because being accepted to a university was a dream. Although no one in his family had attended college, they supported him and his professional goals. He chose to focus on a career that enabled him to give back to his community. By strengthening relationships with stakeholders, he planned to improve neighborhood resources

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and financial support for others. As a young black man, he believed it was important to support his community and improve circumstances and lived experiences.

Funding for university was a challenge. Jerry learned about the U.S. government's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) from his high school guidance counselor, who he trusted. He understood the option for loans and accepted several thousand dollars of debt. The University of Majesty did not offer much in Financial Aid. However, his FAFSA resulted in an impressive amount of aid in the form of a Federal Pell Grant.

Because of the academic challenges Jerry faced in high school, he earned average grades in his courses. Luckily, he learned about the Academic Center and tutors from good friends. By the start of the next semester, his confidence had grown even more. He created a tailored study plan and often sacrificed personal time in order to meet with professors during office hours.

Jerry's academic confidence led him to decide to study abroad during the summer through a faculty-led Sociology course in London. The tuition for the 3-credit course was \$1,200, in addition to \$4,000 for the flight, housing, meals and activities. He spoke to his family about financial support. Gathering more than \$5,000 by the April 30th deadline was not realistic for his family. He entertained the idea of securing another loan, and a friend suggested he meet with the study abroad office staff to learn about financial options or scholarship opportunities.

Jerry met with a staff member and shared his plans, but the staff member admonished him for not knowing that the deadlines for scholarships had already passed. After five minutes, the staff member gave him the phone number for the Financial Aid Office. Jerry felt dismissed. When Jerry spoke to his mom about the encounter, she was disheartened because she knew Jerry had overcome so much already. "It's ok mom. I'll figure something out." Later that day, Jerry visited the Financial Aid Office, but only received a listing of several loan options.

Jerry felt defeated. He decided he would follow the same process he used with his academics: he would ask around and advocate for himself. He told himself he would find someone who could advise him about scholarships and study abroad funding support options.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What practices could The University of Majesty implement to ensure study abroad participation is financially accessible to all students, especially for students with low socioeconomic statuses?
- What policy changes could the U.S. government implement to ensure that study abroad participation is financially accessible to all students, especially for Pell Grant recipients?
- How could the program design of the education abroad programs be adjusted to bring down the overall cost to the student?

- What could the institution do to ensure staff display or practice empathy and understand equity challenges in addressing student cases?
- How could Jerry's experience affect the educational outcomes for Jerry and others?
- What training would be effective for study abroad offices and financial aid staff?
- How could the university adjust its institutional policies and funding sources in order to be more inclusive of students with need-based aid to participate in education abroad programs?