

OFF-CAMPUS STUDY AT BOWDOIN: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How many Bowdoin students study off campus? About 240 students, mostly juniors, study off campus each year. About 55% of any graduating class has studied away for at least a semester.

Where do they study? Bowdoin students study in about 35 countries each year; the most popular countries are the UK, Italy, Spain, and France, with steady numbers in a wide range of countries that include Argentina, Australia, Botswana, Chile, China, Denmark, India, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, and Sri Lanka. A few are studying in programs or universities in the USA.

What do they study? Just about any subject that is compatible with Bowdoin's liberal arts curriculum (we do not give credit for business, marketing, journalism, communications, accounting, etc.) We expect to see a connection between students' course of study at Bowdoin and their off-campus study. Most are taking one or two classes in their major. As well as language majors, we also send many History, English, Government, Economics, Biology, and Environmental Studies majors. But we encourage students majoring in less heavily represented areas to look into the possibilities.

When should students start planning? For study abroad in the junior year, the spring of the first year is not too early to start planning, as it will be necessary to take distribution requirements at Bowdoin before departure, and in many cases language courses as well. The most important planning semester is the fall of the sophomore year; an introductory meeting is held in September, and the Off-Campus Study Fair in October.

How do they decide which program or university to attend? With the help of their faculty advisors and Off-Campus Study staff, students choose from Bowdoin's Program Options List of about 100 programs and universities or, less commonly, petition to attend an unlisted program.

Does Bowdoin run any of its own programs? Bowdoin does not currently offer any programs of its own, but is a member of several program consortia such as ISLE in Sri Lanka, SITA in South India, the Swedish Program in Stockholm, and American University's Washington Semester, and affiliated with some larger study-abroad organizations such as CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange) and IES (Institute for the International Education of Students). But many of the available programs are run by other colleges, universities, or independent program providers.

What are the options for students who don't speak a foreign language? There are many good options, and not just in English-speaking countries — e.g., Copenhagen, Hong Kong, Kandy (Sri Lanka), Madurai (India), Stockholm, Vienna. Some programs in non-English-speaking countries offer most of their courses in English but also an introductory course in the language of the country. We do recommend that students have particularly good academic reasons for choosing a destination that is currently very popular (or saturated) with American students, such as Barcelona, Florence, Rome, and Sydney.

Is it better to go for a semester or a year? A full year is often recommended for language majors, and some programs (e.g., the London School of Economics & Political Science) are full-year only, or operate on such a different system (e.g., Cambridge and Oxford) that a full year is needed to adjust. But for many students their academic schedule or commitments at Bowdoin mean that it is not feasible to be away for a year; about 90% of our students now choose a single-semester option.

Which semester? We ask that students give first consideration to the fall, since Bowdoin has to strike a balance between numbers away in the fall and the more popular spring; occasionally, it may not be possible to approve all students for their first choice of period. We recognize that in some countries there are fewer fall programs that are compatible with Bowdoin's calendar and credit requirements. But students who have studied away in the spring sometimes report that it is hard to make the transition to the senior year and responsibilities such as honors projects and scholarship applications.

Are there any summer program options? The Off-Campus Study Office now has responsibility for summer programs abroad, in which a small number of students (about 15 a year) participate. There is a separate Bowdoin application process (15 April deadline). There is no options list of summer programs, but students often participate in summer versions of semester or full-year programs with which we are familiar. Bowdoin financial aid is not available for summer programs.

Do only juniors study away? Most programs are designed primarily for juniors, but a small number of seniors study away in the fall. Bowdoin does not prohibit sophomores from studying away, although the timing of the application process necessitates very careful planning, and juniors receive priority.

What is Bowdoin's application process? Students need to submit a preliminary application by 2 November of the preceding academic year, to register their preference of period away (full year, fall, or spring), and then submit a regular application by 21 February. They need to show that they have valid academic reasons, and obtain the signature of their major advisor(s). Bowdoin has no GPA requirement, but students must be in good academic and social standing in the semester of their off-campus study.

What is the application process for programs? Students apply to the program or university separately from the Bowdoin application. Deadlines vary, but often fall in March for fall programs and in October for spring programs; some programs operate a system of rolling admissions. It is important not to leave the application to the last minute. Students may apply to some universities through a third-party program, although direct application to an English-speaking university is usually straightforward and much less expensive. A transcript, faculty letter(s) of recommendation, and certification of Bowdoin's approval are typically required. Most institutions have a GPA requirement, often a 3.0 (B average). Language programs usually require two years of college-level language. Students who meet the basic requirements and apply in good time do not generally need to bother with a back-up application.

How does credit transfer? Students receive 4 Bowdoin credits per semester for work done away. They must take a normal full courseload; and a minimum grade of C- must be earned in each course. A student's academic department provisionally approves credit toward the major or minor in advance, to be confirmed upon the student's return. Only the total number of credits earned, without grades, appears on the Bowdoin transcript.

Can a student just take a leave of absence and then transfer the credit? No. Only students who are approved for off-campus study may transfer academic credit to Bowdoin.

How are students housed on their programs? Typical options include a dormitory, small house or apartment, or host family. We strongly encourage Bowdoin students to choose housing, such as with a host family, that will integrate them as fully as possible with the academic and social environment of their host country, and we discourage them from living together.

What about health and safety? Information from programs and their in-country staff, from personal physicians, and from government agencies such as the CDC and State Department help students to make informed choices about their program and its location. There is, of course, much variation from place to place, but it would be wrong to dismiss a program's location on health or safety grounds without careful consideration. There are relatively few serious accidents in study abroad in general, but it is worth remembering that a high proportion of those that do occur are alcohol-related.

How much does it cost? Although the current financial crisis may have an impact on study abroad, it is likely that most programs will stay somewhat less expensive than Bowdoin. A few, including the most selective British universities and some programs run by private U.S. colleges, may cost as much as Bowdoin or more. Direct enrollment in English-speaking universities is less expensive than enrollment through a third-party provider. In the past students have found that personal expenses, especially for travel over breaks, need very careful management, especially while the U.S. dollar has been weak.

Does financial aid transfer? Students may use their Bowdoin and other aid on any program, in the U.S. or abroad, for which they have been approved — up to the cost of attendance at Bowdoin. The Student Aid Office will recalculate the package based on the revised cost of attendance.

How will I be billed? You will be billed directly by the program or university, except for the Bowdoin-sponsored ISLE and SITA programs, for which Bowdoin handles the billing. Separately, Bowdoin charges an off-campus study fee of \$1,000 per program.

Where can I get more information? The best place to start is the Off-Campus Study website, where we have Bowdoin's full *Guidelines for Off-Campus Study* and other links at <www.bowdoin.edu/ocs>.