

# Study Abroad

## Faculty/Staff Leadership & Participation

While leading a study abroad program can be demanding, it can also be incredibly rewarding. Leaders have a front-row seat to students' transformation, and many students will remember the program as their "best experience in college." It is important to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each traveler associated with a study abroad program, both among the leadership team and for the participating students.

**Leader Characteristics** Before proposing a program, prospective leaders are encouraged to reflect on whether they are prepared and committed to lead a program in the coming year. In addition, department heads and deans/designees are encouraged to use the following guidelines and criteria when approving program proposals.

Ideally, a leader:

- Is **well-respected** by students. Positive student evaluations for past MSU courses and/or programs abroad can be a helpful indicator. Students will consider traveling to a relatively unknown or challenging location if they think highly of the leader.
- Has spent **time in the host location(s)**. Preferably the leader has visited the location, but if that is not possible, they will need to partner with in-country contacts who will be traveling with the study abroad program.
- Knows the **host language** (if applicable), as well as the **cultural and social norms** of the host culture.
- Understands and embraces the "**student support**" aspects of program leadership: setting clear expectations, promoting positive group dynamics and inclusion, responding to student crises, etc.
- Will be **present and available** in Starkville, during the student recruitment, preparation, and post-program phases, and be present and available in the host location(s) for the full duration of the program.
- Understands and complies with all University policies, including those prohibiting harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct, as well as host country laws.

### Composition of Leadership Team

MSU requires a minimum of two leaders for all study abroad programs, regardless of the number of students participating. If enrollment exceeds 40 students, a third leader will be required to maintain a maximum student-to-leader ratio of 20:1. While leadership teams and enrollment goals vary widely and are based on many aspects: academic course content, location, logistical details, on-site partner(s) and financial considerations, it is important for the safety and security of our programs that two leaders are present on all study abroad programs.

The primary faculty director should be a MSU faculty member with academic expertise in the program's field(s) of study. A qualified MSU lecturer, instructor, Ph.D. candidate, or staff member may be approved

to serve as the primary faculty director at the discretion of the sponsoring department and college. The primary faculty director is typically the instructor of record for the MSU course associated with the program.

The leadership team and the on-site partner(s) should have **complementary characteristics and skills**. The most effective way to “bridge a gap” associated with local knowledge, host language skills, and student support is to work with a professional education abroad organization. Affiliated custom program organizations can be recommended by OSA.

In addition to the primary faculty director, the leadership team may include one or more co-directors(s):

- **Another MSU faculty member:** Depending on the nature of the program, two faculty members may choose to teach in alternate years, co-teach one course, or offer two or more distinct courses to serve students from different academic departments or colleges.
- **An MSU staff member:** Some faculty directors invite departmental or college staff members or administrators or a Student Affairs professional to co-lead, often assuming duties associated with student support, financial management, and cross-cultural understanding. Staff members’ travel expenses are often incorporated into the program budget, but have also been paid by the supporting college, department, school or academic unit. A staff leader will not typically expect a payment specific to their role as a program leader, as the experience is aligned with their duties on campus or is a professional development experience. Some supervisors may request a buy-out of the staff member’s time.
- **An MSU graduate assistant/teaching assistant/doctoral student:** The opportunity to co-lead may be offered to a full-time MSU graduate (not undergraduate) student who is uniquely qualified to co-lead the program. The opportunity should not be offered simply as a reward or “perk.” The faculty leader should put in writing the expectations, limitations, duties, and privileges of the assistantship, and both the leader and assistant should sign indicating agreement. The department or college should complete the hiring paperwork for the assistant. A labor stipend is optional and may be incorporated into the program budget or paid by the department/college/school/unit.
- **A faculty leader at a partner institution:** Some programs run in tandem with other universities to share logistical support. The leaders at the two institutions might agree to co-teach the course and/or serve as back-up leaders to students from the other institution.

It is important to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each leader associated with the faculty-led program, both among the leadership team and for the participating students. Leaders should discuss the principal responsibilities of the program and discuss who is responsible for each task prior to departure.

### **Required Leadership Training**

All MSU program leaders must attend a Study Abroad Faculty Director Training session. Sessions will be organized by the Office of Study Abroad and held three times throughout the year. Leaders must attend one session every three years. Details and dates can be found on the OSA website or by contacting OSA directly.

# Policy on Unaffiliated Travelers

When traveling with University students during official program dates, program leaders are responsible for academic and student support, and are expected to be available to students 24/7.

University leadership and OSA discourage program leaders to be accompanied at any point by any **unaffiliated traveler** on an education abroad program. Nevertheless, under special circumstances, a program leader may request to do so with the understanding that the University takes no responsibility for unaffiliated travelers. For such an exception, the program leader must seek approval from the department head and dean based on the context and parameters noted below. Approval is subject to a final review by the Associate Vice President for International Programs and the Director of Study Abroad. The following must be met:

- The program is structured to allow for the separation of personal and professional life. Equally important, the presence of the unaffiliated traveler(s) does not interfere in any way with the academic program and program leader's responsibilities.

Unaffiliated travelers eligible for consideration and approval are limited to the program leader's partner/spouse and/or minor dependent(s), per the definitions and parameters noted below:

- **A Partner/Spouse** is defined as a program leader's spouse or partner. An unaffiliated traveler partner/spouse must have no responsibilities on behalf of the University (e.g. taking roll, managing program funds, counseling students, etc.).
- **Minor Child/Children:** A leader's minor dependent child/children may accompany the leader if the following conditions are met:
  1. A non-leader adult serving as caretaker for any child under the age of 16 must be present for the full duration of the program. If the caretaker is not the leader's spouse or partner, the leader may ask another adult to serve as the designated caretaker. Program participants should never be asked to care for a leader's child/children, given the potential conflict of interest.
  2. A co-leader may not also be the designated caretaker.

## **Unaffiliated Traveler: Financial, Administrative, and Legal Considerations:**

The University does not provide any financial and administrative support, nor does it assume any responsibility or liability for unaffiliated travelers on MSU programs. The program leader is responsible for ensuring that an unaffiliated traveler understands and complies with all University policies, including those prohibiting harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct, as well as host country laws. The leader will assume full responsibility for the conduct of the unaffiliated traveler. In addition, State statute prohibits the use of University funds to pay for expenses of unaffiliated travelers.

- **Approval:** If an unaffiliated traveler(s) plans to accompany the leader, the program leader must inform OSA of these plans during the program proposal process. The leader must outline how the separation of personal and professional life will be maintained. The program leader is also responsible for describing how the traveler will not interfere in any way with the academic program and program leader's responsibilities.

- **Payments:** Program leaders are responsible for making all travel arrangements for unaffiliated travelers (partner/spouse, children, and caretaker). Any expenses incurred by the addition of an unaffiliated traveler shall not be paid by the participating students, and unaffiliated travelers should pay a portion of all shared group expenses. Travel advance funds may not be used to pay the expenses of unaffiliated travelers.
- **Accident/Sickness & Evacuation Insurance:** Partner/spouse, children, and caretaker must enroll and purchase travel accident insurance coverage equal to or exceeding the coverage [provided by the University](#). To meet this requirement and ensure a coordinated response in the event of an emergency for both an employee and their partner/spouse, children, and caretaker, it is highly recommended that travel accident insurance be purchased from the University's travel accident insurance provider. Payment is the responsibility of the employee.
- **Lodging:** Unaffiliated travelers may share lodging accommodations with the leader, if such sharing is allowed by the lodging provider and does not interfere with the leader's responsibilities. Program funds can only cover the cost of housing for the individual leader (for example, a single hotel room or a studio apartment).
- **Release of liability:** All leaders and unaffiliated adult travelers will be required to sign a Waiver and Release Agreement for Unaffiliated Travelers.

#### **Partner/Spouse with Formal Leadership Role**

As appropriate, a partner or spouse who is an MSU employee, may serve as a co-leader with a formal affiliation to the program.

- If a partner/spouse serves as a co-leader, this must be **specified in the program proposal**.
- **Partners/spouses who are both MSU employees** may co-lead with chair/dean approval, in which case both employees will be expected to assume the full responsibilities associated with program leadership and sign the Faculty-led Proposal Agreement.

#### **Travel Party**

The travel party associated with a faculty-led study abroad program, should consist of only students enrolled in the course and registered through the Office of Study Abroad, program leaders, approved partner/spouse, minor children, or caretakers.