



TAKING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD

Just a short walk from the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, best known for housing Michelangelo's David sculpture, is Gonzaga University's Florence campus. The Jesuit liberal arts university in Spokane, Wash., established its Gonzaga in Florence program in 1963 to foster global engagement. Today, the university sends 185 undergraduate students each spring and fall semester, plus an additional 50 or so in the summer, to its Italian campus.

"Gonzaga in Florence is designed as our core study abroad program, meaning that any Zag across any major can go to Florence and take classes that count toward their core requirements for their degree from Gonzaga," says Richard Menard, Director of the Center for Global Engagement at Gonzaga. Each semester, the university offers more than 20 core classes in subjects as varied as ethics and differential equations.

Menard's assertion that the program is designed for any student, in any major is more than lip service. The university created tracks to ensure that students in rigorous majors with a prescribed sequence of coursework can spend a semester abroad. For example, Gonzaga in Florence offers an engineering track each spring for sophomores.

"Students have the opportunity to take engineering classes, plus core classes, so when they come back home they are still in step with the rest of the engineering program," says Menard. Last spring, 65 engineering students participated in the track.

MANAGING AN
INSTITUTIONALLY-
BRANDED STUDY
ABROAD PROGRAM
CAN PUT YOUR
UNIVERSITY ON THE
MAP.



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ADVANTAGES OF RUNNING YOUR OWN PROGRAM

Being able to offer a breadth of classes tailored to the needs of a university's students is a primary benefit of institutionally-branded study abroad programs such as Gonzaga in Florence. For more than 40 years, Skidmore College has run its own education abroad programs. The liberal arts college in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., currently offers programs in London, New Zealand, Paris and Spain.



"What makes our programs special is they have all been developed in conjunction with Skidmore faculty and vetted by our faculty, curriculum committee and campus governance," says

Cori Filson, Director of Off-Campus Study & Exchanges at Skidmore. "The courses are in line with Skidmore expectations and have the same rigor and support we have on campus, only abroad."

Being able to offer substantial student support is a critical advantage of institution-run programs. All of the "Skidmore In" programs, as the college calls them, include a full meal plan, transportation passes, extracurricular activities, tutoring and academic support. "We have cohorts on campus that are nervous about studying abroad, and we can say, 'All of the things you can get here on campus, you can get there as well,'" says Filson.

Another benefit of running branded programs is the ease with which you can tailor coursework to fit degree requirements, as Menard alluded to earlier in relation to engineering students. Approximately 50% of Gonzaga undergraduates participate in education abroad programs around the world, and the university has great relationships with institutions such as the University of Glasgow and the University of Auckland.

"But the task of getting those classes matched up to our degree plan requires a certain level of jumping through hoops," says Menard. "That causes additional work that you don't have when you own an institutionally-branded program."



DRAWBACKS TO CONSIDER

Of course, there are downsides to running your own education abroad program, too. "You have a responsibility to your overseas staff and the host community to run programs in an ethical manner that ensures they are mutually beneficial," says Filson. "Sometimes our field doesn't do a great job about that, but we take it very seriously. We want to make sure we are part of the community, not creating additional challenges."

Beyond the ethical considerations are more practical ones related to legal, human resource and risk management issues. "When you run your own study abroad programs, you become like a mini-college in those communities," says Filson. "You are responsible for all the same areas as offices on campus, such as risk management, student conduct, the registrar."

Gonzaga knows the challenges first-hand. Previously, the university rented space in the Palazzo Antinori, a notable Renaissance palace. But then the university opted to buy its own building on the Piazza San Marco, centrally located among Florence's popular sites. "Once you buy a building, you're in a different tax bracket and dealing with a lot of legalities as an American non-profit institution working in a foreign country," says Menard.

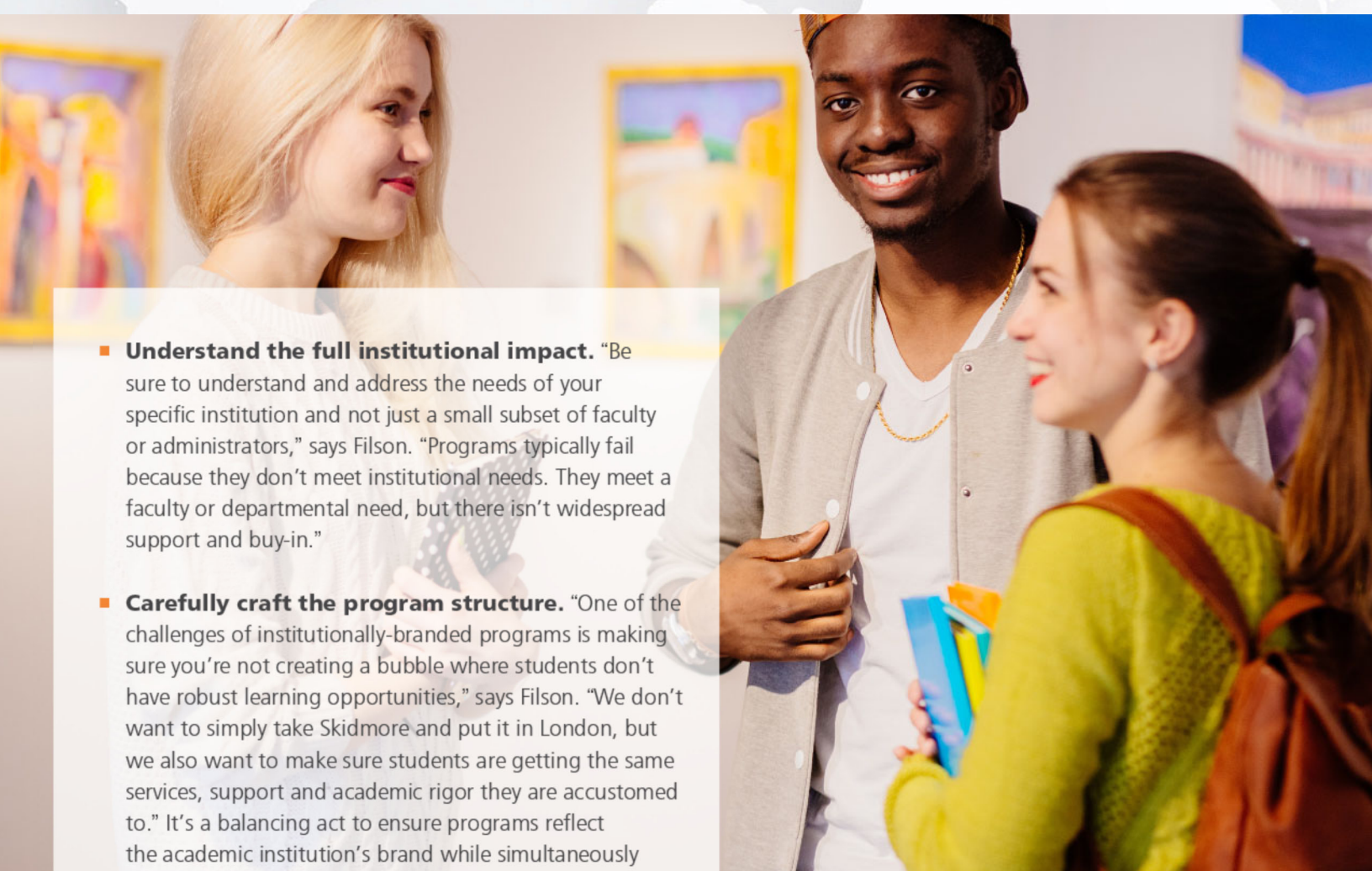
There's also risk associated with world events. "During these times of global unrest and financial insecurity, the consequences fall to you if you run your own program," says

Filson. "The benefits of institutionally-branded programs typically outweigh the risks, but when problems arise you are forced to make difficult decisions about whether to continue to run the program and how it impacts your students, your overseas community and your campus programs."



ADVICE FOR **BUILDING** FLAGSHIP PROGRAMS

If you're thinking about developing an institutionally-branded study abroad program, consider the following suggestions:

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- **Understand the full institutional impact.** “Be sure to understand and address the needs of your specific institution and not just a small subset of faculty or administrators,” says Filson. “Programs typically fail because they don’t meet institutional needs. They meet a faculty or departmental need, but there isn’t widespread support and buy-in.”
 - **Carefully craft the program structure.** “One of the challenges of institutionally-branded programs is making sure you’re not creating a bubble where students don’t have robust learning opportunities,” says Filson. “We don’t want to simply take Skidmore and put it in London, but we also want to make sure students are getting the same services, support and academic rigor they are accustomed to.” It’s a balancing act to ensure programs reflect the academic institution’s brand while simultaneously immersing students in the local culture.
 - **Appeal to a broad array of students.** “When I look at how most institutions design their programs, they are very niche specific—a language-intensive program for a Spanish major or a venue to provide internships to business majors,” says Menard. “I think institutions should step back and ask how they can offer all their students the same opportunity.” Gonzaga students in all disciplines participate in a variety of study abroad programs, including 25% of STEM majors.
 - **Don’t dismiss the idea of teaming with a program partner.** “Understand what the actual resource implications are for hosting an institutionally-branded education abroad program, and think about how you can perhaps partner with another organization to minimize your risk,” says Filson. “The partnerships we

have with our different providers are invaluable, and we couldn’t offer all the kinds of programs we do just through ‘Skidmore In’ programs.” The college offers more than 100 study abroad programs in 45 countries, including the “Skidmore In” programs.

- **Use the program for faculty enrichment, too.** Gonzaga hires Italian faculty for its program in Florence, but the university also sends professors from Spokane. For example, each spring a mathematics professor from the home campus joins the engineering track to teach differential equations, statistics for engineers or other classes. “It gives faculty the opportunity to enrich their personal lives, as well as take what they learn in Florence and integrate it into their syllabi, teaching and pedagogy here in Spokane,” says Menard.

- **Embrace program evolution.** “The hallmark of a really strong program is the ability to be flexible and evolve as student and institutional needs evolve,” says Filson. “The programs that Skidmore started in Spain and Paris more than 40 years ago are definitely not the same programs we have today—and they shouldn’t be.” Avoid allowing your homegrown programs to become stale by staying on top of changes in the study abroad field, in the host country, at your institution and within your student body.

Institutionally-run study abroad programs can help promote your brand around the world—and on your home

campus—as well as position your institution as a leader in international education. “The fact that we’ve had our own program for over 40 years really signals our commitment to supporting international education,” says Filson. “It’s a hallmark for Skidmore.”

Menard echoes that sentiment. “Starting our flagship program 57 years ago kicked off our ability to provide international education at this institution,” he says. The university now offers education abroad on every continent except Antarctica. “Florence in Gonzaga has set the stage for us to educate our students in ways the founders of the program couldn’t have envisioned in 1963.”



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