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

An ideal student-to-leader ratio of 15:1 can be used as a general benchmark in determining the minimum and maximum student enrollment goals. The ratio should not be less than 5:1 or greater than 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 that minimum and maximum ratios are observed. Any ratios falling outside the maximum and minimum range will require approval from the Office of Study Abroad. Leaders should also consult with the Office of Study Abroad about minimum and maximum enrollment numbers throughout the proposal process.

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 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.