

STUDY ABROAD TRANSFER OF CREDIT GUIDELINES FOR GVSU FACULTY

OVERVIEW

Study Abroad Transfer of Credit has a different set of guidelines than the standard credit transfers that students bring in from other institutions. The primary distinction between the two is that study abroad students are registered at GVSU during the semester they are abroad. If students are studying abroad on a faculty-led program, independent study or internship where the credit is issued by GVSU, they will register for a specific GVSU course and will receive a grade from the GVSU faculty director. If students are participating in a study abroad program where the credit is transferred to GVSU from a host institution, the student will register ahead of time for a placeholder course called International Studies 380 (IS 380), which allows the student to maintain his/her status at GVSU, access financial aid, and access all other services offered by GVSU. This document serves to clarify the guidelines for reviewing study abroad course descriptions for students who will be transferring credits back to GVSU from a host university.

WHO HAS THE AUTHORITY?

When reviewing a study abroad course description in order to assign a GVSU course equivalency, there are several factors that need to be considered. First, the person assigning the GVSU course equivalency should only assign course equivalencies for courses in his/her home department. Second, students who are seeking approval for either Supplemental Writing Skills (SWS) credit or General Education credit should be directed to the appropriate office for instructions on securing approval. Finally, all signed course equivalencies are final unless otherwise noted.

Each department can determine who has the authority to assign GVSU course equivalencies for study abroad courses. There are several different models for how this is handled. In most cases, the Department Chair takes the responsibility for reviewing study abroad course descriptions. Some departments allow all faculty to review study abroad course descriptions in order to assign a GVSU equivalency. If your department has not discussed this matter, Padnos International Center (PIC) strongly recommends that this be addressed in an upcoming departmental meeting.

SUPPLEMENTAL WRITING SKILLS (SWS) CREDIT

For SWS credit, students should be directed to contact the Director of the SWS Program. Unlike most other reviews, students interested in securing approval for SWS credit will not be given approval until after they return from study abroad. Students will be required to show evidence of the work they completed overseas for a specific course they believe meets the SWS requirements. The student should return with all completed coursework, and the course syllabus.

GENERAL EDUCATION ISSUES CREDIT

For Issues credit, students should be directed to the PIC International Center website, www.gvsu.edu/studyabroad, for instructions on how to earn credit for the Study Abroad Issues. The General Education Director is the only person with the authority to approve study abroad courses to meet the Issues requirements. The student **must** submit a Study Abroad Issues Reflection Essay in order to secure approval.

GENERAL EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS

Departments are encouraged, where appropriate, to assign exact GVSU course equivalencies that will automatically fulfill General Education Foundations credit. Students are often in need of guidance in identifying courses that will meet one of these University requirements. If an overseas course description does not match well with a GVSU General Education Foundations course, it would be most appropriate to assign a GVSU course equivalency of 180, 280, or 380 “special topics” credit. In this case, since 180, 280, and 380 courses do not automatically fulfill General Education Foundations, the student would be directed to complete the appropriate form in order to request approval for an overseas course to meet a specific General Education requirement.

Detailed information about the approval process and required forms is available on the PIC website at: www.gvsu.edu/studyabroad, click on “Academics.”

WORLD PERSPECTIVES CREDIT

Students who earn at least 3 credits through study abroad will automatically fulfill the World Perspectives General Education requirement. The student is not required to submit a form requesting approval.

GENERAL EDUCATION US DIVERSITY CREDIT

Proposals to earn General Education: US Diversity credit abroad will not be considered.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR STUDY ABROAD CREDITS

- 1) All study abroad courses not taught by a GVSU faculty member must be assigned a GVSU course equivalency.
- 2) All study abroad course equivalencies must be assigned an actual GVSU course number. GEN credit is not an option when reviewing a study abroad course; however it is common for departments to assign 180, 280 or 380 credit for a course which does not have an exact equivalent. The reason GEN credit is not an option is because all study abroad students maintain their registration status at GVSU for the semester they are studying abroad. Since the student is registered for a placeholder course (IS 380) while they are abroad, we must replace the IS 380 credits with an actual GVSU course once they return.
- 3) Students are responsible for securing the GVSU course equivalency for each course they complete overseas. PIC encourages students to do this prior to their departure for study abroad, especially if there is a specific requirement the student would like to have met. It is important for students to know how a particular course will fit into their degree requirements here at GVSU.
- 4) If you do not have enough information to make a final decision on a GVSU course equivalency and would prefer to make a final assessment when the student returns, please indicate in writing that the final approval will not be issued until the student returns home and shows evidence of the work completed abroad. PIC encourages faculty to minimize making tentative course approvals, but in some instances, delaying final approval is warranted.
- 5) As with institutional requirements here on-campus, students can double-dip by getting approval for a course to meet more than one degree requirement. We encourage faculty advisors to put all approvals in writing and to utilize the Study Abroad Credit Form when possible.

- 6) PIC encourages students to get multiple courses approved in advance. There are as many variations in registration procedures as there are variations in education systems. It is common for the following problems to arise:
- a. Time conflicts with other courses the student needs to take
 - b. Limited course options at the host institution
 - c. Minimum language requirements – language placement exams are usually taken on-site, so students may not know what level they place into until they are abroad
 - d. Course cancellations
 - e. Students may not know until they are on-site whether or not they have an adequate academic background to take a course
 - f. Low enrollment may cause a course to be cancelled

COURSE INFORMATION

In order to assign a GVSU course equivalency, you will need to know some important information about the study abroad course. The following is a list of important components you will want to keep in mind when reviewing the course information:

- a. At a minimum, students should supply you with a course description and information for how the number of credits is determined.
- b. Common credit schemes include: quarter hours, ECTS, points, units, US credit, semester credit?
- c. How many contact hours are involved with this course? As a general rule, GVSU assigns 1 credit for every 15 contact hours. Education systems vary greatly from country to country. There may be reasons to make an exception to this rule based on the course content and the course workload. If you are unsure about how many credits to assign a particular course, please contact the Rebecca Hambleton in the PIC for a recommendation.
- d. Students typically complete 12-15 credits during one semester. On a rare occasion, a student may secure approval to complete as many as 21 credits in one semester. Students may not transfer back more than 21 credits in one semester. Departments may not know the full picture of how many courses/credits a student will complete through study abroad since only one course description may be presented at a time. It is important to ask about the contact hours in order to avoid assigning 3 credits to a course that is equivalent to only 1 credit.
- e. If an overseas course is assigned a specific GVSU course equivalency and that GVSU course has a set credit variable of 3 credits, the student will receive 3 credits for that course. It is not an option to give the student 2 credits for a course that is on record at GVSU as a 3 credit course. For greater flexibility, departments often use 180, 280 or 380 equivalencies since most of these courses are listed in the GVSU catalog as “variable credit.”
- f. GVSU does not recognize .5 (half) credits. If PIC receives a GVSU course equivalency listing 2.5, PIC will evaluate the credit information and make a final determination.

TRANSFER OF CREDIT PROCESS

In order for PIC to finalize the transfer of credit from a host university, two components are required:

- (1) PIC must have an official transcript or certificate of completion from the host institution.
- (2) PIC must have a GVSU course equivalency on file for each course the student completed abroad.

While PIC recommends that students secure all course equivalencies prior to departure, it is common for students to change courses once they arrive at the host institution. If this occurs, PIC will suggest to

the student that he/she secure departmental approval via email prior to the end of the registration period. Once a student returns home, PIC will send an email notice once the official transcript arrives. At that time, the student will be given clear information on which courses still require a GVSU course equivalency. The student will have one semester after PIC receives the transcript from the host institution to secure all remaining GVSU course equivalencies.

FAQ's

- 1. Who keeps track of the study abroad course equivalencies?** The Padnos International Center keeps all departmental approvals in each student's file. If a student is participating in one of GVSU's exchange programs and we have a GVSU Course Equivalency Chart on our website for that program, the student will receive the credit listed on the Course Equivalency Chart. Since many courses are interdisciplinary, students can request approval either from another department, or for a different course in the same department. PIC will use the course equivalencies that are on file for a specific student and will then reference the GVSU Course Equivalency Chart for any remaining courses that are transferring back from the host institution. www.gvsu.edu/studyabroad click on "Academics."
- 2. Why do some programs have a GVSU course equivalency chart?**
In order to create added value to GVSU programs, the Padnos International Center worked with individual departments to secure course equivalencies for the courses offered through GVSU's Partnerships. While this is not an extensive list and is likely to change over time, this will help students develop an academic plan for their semester abroad. Additionally, we hope that the pre-approved lists will reduce the number of requests that faculty receive to review course descriptions for study abroad students.
- 3. Are students subject to the last 30 credits in residence policy?**
All study abroad students maintain their registration status here at GVSU; therefore, they meet the residency requirement for completing the last 30 credits at GVSU.
- 4. What is ECTS?**
European Credit Transfer System. This is the European system for allowing students to accumulate credits for the learning achieved through higher education. The ECTS credit variable is determined by evaluating the modules, learning outcomes, workload, and assessment of a particular course of study. A much greater emphasis is placed on learning outcomes rather than contact hours.
- 5. What if a course is interdisciplinary?** If a course is interdisciplinary, the student can select which department to secure a course equivalency from.
- 6. How do study abroad courses affect a student's GPA?** Students will receive credit/no credit for the courses they take overseas. The GPA will not be affected.
- 7. Is there a cap on how many semesters a student can study abroad through GVSU?**
Yes, 4 semesters at full-time.

8. Should I use the Study Abroad Credit Form or send an email approval to PIC?

The Study Abroad Credit Form is the preferred tool, but email approvals are acceptable provided that the same information that is collected on the form is listed in the email approval.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

GVSU Registration Problems

It is not uncommon for study abroad students to run into problems with registering for classes for the next academic year. With time differences, constraints on the availability of the internet, etc. , students may contact departments directly to seek advice on how to get into a class they were unable to register for.

Students who study abroad for the academic year may have completed the fall semester, however their credits may not be transferred back to GVSU by the time registration opens for the next academic year. Students are often stuck at a lower level which puts them at a disadvantage during the GVSU registration process in March.

PIC encourages departments to assist students in getting into classes which may be full. We encourage departments to offer as much support and flexibility as possible so that students are not at a disadvantage for choosing to study abroad.

Students should be made aware that future employers, graduate schools, and fellowship committees will likely request transcripts from all institutions where credit was received.

POLICIES RELATED TO STUDY ABROAD

PRE-APPROVAL PIC strongly recommends that students obtain GVSU course equivalencies prior to departure for study abroad. In order to avoid complications on-site, students should secure course equivalencies for alternate courses in the event that course selections change upon arrival at the host institution. If a student registers for a course overseas that has not been pre-approved, we recommend that the student secure the course equivalency via email by contacting the Department Chair of the relevant academic department. For example, if you would like credit from the History Department, you would contact the Department Chair of History to secure the GVSU course equivalency. All course approvals must be forwarded on to Chris Borda the Padnos International Center at: bordac@gvsu.edu.

GRADE CONVERSIONS

All study abroad courses must be taken for a grade. A grade conversion will be made upon receipt of an official transcript from the host institution. PIC uses common two grade conversion scales:

World Education Services (WES) International Grade Conversions, www.wes.org

Foreign Credits Translation and Evaluation, www.foreigncredits.com

Grading systems vary from institution to institution. There are some common guidelines used in different education systems, but not all institutions will use the same grading system. Students should research in advance their specific program to make sure they understand the grading expectations.

CREDIT/NO CREDIT (CR/NC) All courses taken abroad will transfer back to GVSU as credit or no credit. Credit will be granted for those courses in which the student earns a grade equivalent to a C or better. Note: Courses that are graded CR/NC as the standard grading scheme, such as study abroad transfer credits, do not count toward the maximum number of CR/NC courses a student can take at GVSU. Courses taken abroad will not impact a student's GPA at GVSU.

REPEATING COURSES Courses completed abroad cannot be used to repeat or replace the grade for a course previously taken on-campus.

MINIMUM GPA REQUIREMENT GVSU students are required to have a minimum GPA of a 2.5 at the time of application for study abroad.

LAST 30 CREDITS "IN RESIDENCE" All students approved by the Padnos International Center for participation in study abroad will be required to register at GVSU during the semester they will be overseas. Since study abroad students maintain their registration status at GVSU, they will meet the residency requirement.

AUDITING COURSES Study abroad participants are not allowed to audit courses they take through study abroad. If a course is audited, it will not be recognized at GVSU when credits are transferred.

CREDIT SYSTEMS There are a number of variables that factor into credit systems used by other countries and institutions. The most common variations are listed here. However, if you find information that does not fit one of these examples, please contact the Padnos International Center for guidance on determining the credit variable for a particular course or set of courses.

- 1 GVSU credit typically comprises 15 in class contact hours (3 GVSU credits = 45 contact hours).
- European Credit Transfer System (ECTS): As a general rule, it is approximately 2 ECTS credits to 1 GVSU credit. There are variations to how this is evaluated, so faculty will often review the contact hours as well when determining the number of credits.
- Quarter vs. semester credits: To convert quarter credit hours into semester credit hours divide by 1.5. For example, if a course is worth 6 quarter credits it is equal to 4 semester credit hours.
- .5 (half) credits – GVSU does not recognize .5 (half) credits. It is at the discretion of the faculty advisor to either round up or round down based on the review of the course information submitted. If this is not clear, PIC will make the final determination of the number of credits.

FULL-TIME STATUS During the fall or winter semesters, students are expected to maintain full-time status (12-15 US credits) while studying abroad.

CREDIT MAXIMUM PER SEMESTER Students who study abroad during the fall or winter semester (or both) must take a minimum of 12 US credits during the semester.

Students may not transfer back more than 21 credit hours in one semester.

COURSE EQUIVALENCIES All course equivalencies must have a course prefix and number. GEN credit is not an option for study abroad transfer credit. Course equivalencies should clearly indicate the number of credit hours a student will earn upon completion of a specific overseas course. It is recommended that departments use 180, 280, or 380 credit for overseas course descriptions that do not fit an existing GVSU course.

SUPPLEMENTAL WRITING SKILLS (SWS) CREDIT Students interested in seeking SWS credit for an overseas course must contact the Director of the SWS Program. Unlike other approvals, students seeking SWS credit will be required to supply significant documentation on the coursework completed upon return from study abroad. SWS credit will not be approved prior to departure. The SWS Director is solely responsible for approving SWS credit for courses taken overseas.