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# How Studying Abroad Made Me a Better Librarian: Making Libraries Part of the Journey

Jordan Moore

*AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library*

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Jordan Moore

# How studying abroad made me a better librarian

## Making libraries part of the journey

I am the Foreign Languages librarian at my institution, the Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library. Years before this, I was a Spanish student studying in Mexico.

When I became the Foreign Languages librarian, I made a point to visit the study abroad offices of the institutions my library serves to see how I could assist them and their students. Listening to their needs, and remembering my own time as a study abroad student, helped me develop an information package advising students about how they can still use their home library, regardless of where they study.

### The handout

The idea of remote access to a library is by no means revolutionary, but it takes on a special meaning for study abroad students. Most students may know that remote access allows them to use electronic library resources in their dorms or at a coffee shop, but they do not necessarily make the leap to think they can still access these resources in a London pub or a hostel in Johannesburg.

The study abroad handout I created makes it clear to students that wherever they have Internet (and no government firewalls), they have the library. The handout lists the steps necessary to create a remote access account, paying particular attention to specify what steps they need to take while still on campus. The handout also includes instructions for students to retrieve lost user information on their own, so they do not have to contact the library from abroad.

This is not so say that communicating with library staff is not an option for study abroad students. In the handout, I let students know that

they can use our website's chat feature to speak to library staff (with a reminder to consider time zones before they do). I also show them how they can email our reference department or the subject librarian of their choice. Each handout also has my contact information.

The most critical portion of the handout is the "before you leave campus" segment, which lists the things students should do before the end of their last on-campus semester. As stated before, that includes setting up a remote access account. It also includes making sure their patron account is clear so they do not return to campus with unexpected fines.

### The talk

While I have distributed the library handout to each campus that uses our library, one campus has taken the extra step of integrating me into their study abroad orientation. Each semester, while students about to depart for study abroad learn international customs and credit transfers, they also learn library resources. I walk them through the handout, again paying special attention to what they should do while still on campus, and ask them if they have any questions. I can usually expect three to five questions about what we have just covered.

I also take a moment to share things I have learned through my own study abroad experience. I tell them that when I was in Mexico, my host institution's library was a great resource. Not only did it have a collection better focused

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Jordan Moore is reference librarian at Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library, email: [jmoore@aucr.edu](mailto:jmoore@aucr.edu)

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on the subjects I was studying, it was one of the very few buildings that had reliable climate control and Internet access. For these scholarly and practical reasons, I encourage students to visit their host libraries. I also tell students how helpful it was for me to have access to my home institution's library during my studies abroad. In the middle of adjusting to so many new things, it was comforting to work with something as familiar as my home library's website. Additionally, to the students that will be completing their studies in another language, I confess that I would occasionally boost my essays' word counts by quoting English-language resources and then translating them into Spanish. Again, scholarly and practical.

In this spirit of candor, I also touch on the oft-repeated subject of safety with the students. I recount to them how, while my time abroad was wonderful and life-changing, it did have a sad moment when I was careless about watching my belongings and had my wallet stolen. That unfortunate incident, which happened in the last weeks of my studies, put a damper on my remaining time in Mexico and my return to the United States.

Of course, students are lectured on end about safety before and during their study abroad, but these talks are sometimes impersonal and overly broad. It is my hope that hearing about one specific incident involving a person they know will help them keep their safety in mind, where it always needs to be.

## Conclusion

It is very rewarding to be able to use my experience as a former study abroad student, in addition to my knowledge as a librarian, to help

students have the best study abroad experience possible. To any librarian hoping to do the same, I would recommend the following:

1. *Talk to many departments.* Study abroad offices go by many names. I found the study abroad office for one campus through a connection with a Foreign Languages faculty member. Some departments, such as business schools, often have their own programs to travel to countries with emerging economies. Talk to them all. Let them know that you can help students and faculty, even when they are out of the country.

2. *Don't assume anyone knows what they (or you) can do.* Many study abroad faculty are just as surprised as their students when they learn everything that remote access can do, or all the ways they can contact librarians. Even those that know about library services may not realize that these services are available globally.

3. *Think like a homesick student.* When promoting your own library and whatever host library students may have access to, talk about libraries as a source of stability and familiarity. It doesn't matter whether students visit your library's page for a particular resource or a taste of home. It doesn't matter whether they visit a new library for foreign material or the air conditioning.

4. *Make it personal.* Finally, I would recommend any librarian who has also had a study abroad experience to contemplate what they learned during that time and how it may benefit future generations of travelers. Study abroad experiences are incredibly personal in the impact they have on students, but they are universal in their ability to broaden students' minds. It is only fitting that libraries and librarians are part of the journey. ♪

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*("My unpublished research was scooped?" continues from page 298)*

5. Allen Taflove, "Finite-difference time-domain model of lasing action in a four-level two-electron atomic system: Erratum," *Opt. Express* 14 (2006): 1702-1702, doi: 10.1364/OE.14.001702.

6. The District Court's opinion includes quotations from a plagiarism inquiry committee at Northwestern (*Ho v. Taflove*, 696 F. Supp. 2d at 955), which suggests the internal

mechanisms did at least come into play.

7. 17 U.S.C. § 102.

8. *Feist Publications, Inc., v. Rural Telephone Service Co.*, 499 U.S. 340 (1991).

9. *Ho v. Taflove*, 648 F.3d, at 498.

10. *Ho v. Taflove*, 648 F.3d, at 499.

11. *Ho v. Taflove*, 696 F. Supp. 2d at 958 (noting counsel filed a motion of a type that doesn't exist). ♪