

International Studies Program ~ Spring 2014 Update

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This bulletin is directed to all ISU faculty affiliated with the International Studies Program (ISP). Its purpose is to:

- Report the results of our spring elections to governance positions and other “personnel” changes,
- Inform the Affiliated Faculty about actions taken over the past year by the IS Advisory Board (IS-AB),
- Raise issues currently facing the governance in ISP,
- Announce student awards and program completions,
- Generally raise awareness about the ISP among the relevant faculty.

Advisory Board Actions

Resolving the Dilemma of Study Abroad Records in Relation to Financial Aid

Between summer 2013 and fall 2013 several students returning from programs abroad became ensnared in a new ISU policy that requires official records for academic work to be received before financial aid will be released for a subsequent term of study. Because transcripts and grade reports from programs abroad are provided according to different calendars, their receipt by ISU is often delayed, sometimes by months. This meant that some returning students faced beginning their fall semester without essential financial aid.

Through extensive discussions the IS-AB convinced the ISU administration to adopt a Standard Operating Procedure to resolve this dilemma. While financial aid disbursement will still be withheld pending receipt of study abroad records, ISU will, as a matter of course, provide bridge financing to students who are returning from study abroad. First, payment of tuition and fees can be delayed without penalty. Second, students may obtain loans from ISU to cover other expenses as they begin their studies in a term subsequent to study abroad. (See appendix.)

Navigating the Dissolution of Interdisciplinary Programs (IP)

Last year’s report noted the uncertain administrative future that the ISP faced, given Dean Murray’s initiative to dissolve Interdisciplinary Programs and replace it with a new academic department: the Department of Multidisciplinary Studies. We now know more about this proposed administrative restructuring, and the IS-AB played a role in shaping the proposal. The essence of this reorganization is to use a new department as an administrative home for the current three programs that comprise IP and to further combine them with the Department of Philosophy (which will be dissolved) and the minor in sociology as well as the sociology faculty (who will be reassigned from the D. of Psychology).

The initial proposal that emerged from the working group that Dean Murray convened was rejected by the IS-AB as well as the IS Affiliated Faculty (IS-AF) because it lacked sufficient assurance that the Affiliated Faculty and the IS-AB would continue to have administrative and curricular authority over the ISP. We provided alternative language that was adopted into a revised proposal. The essence of this change was a provision that guarantees that the current bylaws governing ISP under the current administrative arrangement could continue with the same authority within the new department. The Faculty Council of the College of Arts and Sciences approved Dean Murray’s proposal (vote: 8 – 6), but the proposal must be considered at further levels in the University before it would come into force. The process continues, and ISP is within IP until a final decision by the Board of Trustees.

Revision of Bylaws

The bylaws governing the ISP were revised in two ways. First, voting rights were extended to the ISU Director of Academic Programs Abroad, who serves on the IS-AB ex officio. Second, a section with several provisions was added to clarify the role and selection of the Academic Advisor for the International Studies Program. A current version of the bylaws is available on the IS website.

Curriculum Adjustment for International Students

The IS-AB discussed the potential for international students to engage in studies for the IS Minor and whether and how the curriculum should be adjusted for their particular circumstances. Only one decision was made: to waive the study abroad requirement, since by being at ISU these students are already engaged in study abroad. Other adjustments will be considered in future. (See below.)

New People in International Studies Roles

Director of Academic Programs Abroad

In January *Janis Halpern* resigned from ISU. As many of you know, Janis was a motivating force behind study abroad programs at ISU. We believe an excellent replacement has been found in *Christine Strong*, who began working at ISU in April as Director of Academic Programs Abroad. Christine will also join the IS-AB as an ex officio member.

Affiliated Faculty (IS-AF)

During the past academic year five ISU faculty members have joined the IS-AF:

Melanie D'Amico, Assistant Professor of Spanish

Aruna Chandrasekaran, Professor of Management, Information Systems and Business Education

James Gustafson, Assistant Professor of History

Lynn Maurer, Professor of Political Science and Dean of the College of Professional and Graduate Studies

Sala Wong, Associate Professor of Digital Art

IS Advisory Board Members

Ethan Strigas, Betty Phillips and Aruna Chandra will be rotating off of the IS-AB and will be replaced by the following members from the IS-AF:

Melanie D'Amico, Assistant Professor of Spanish

Donald Richards, Professor of Economics

Sala Wong, Associate Professor of Digital Art

Representatives to the Council of Programs

Ethan Strigas and Betty Phillips will also be stepping down as IS Representatives to the Council of Programs. The following IS-AF members will take on those roles (at least as long as IP still has an administrative life):

Sala Wong, Associate Professor of Digital Design

Anne Foster, Associate Professor of History

Awards, Scholarships and Minor Completions

The following students received recognitions for their performance in International Studies:

Matthew Megenhardt ~ *International Studies Expert*

Matthew Bueker ~ *International Studies Ambassador*

Two students were awarded scholarships for a Study Abroad Experience (\$500 each):

Ethan Davis, *Japan* – summer and fall 2014. (\$500)

Colby Pomar, *Tasmania* – fall 2014. (\$500)

The following students completed their Senior Projects for IS – 490 and thus the IS Minor requirements.

Olivia Bohnhoff ~ *Inequality in Chile: The Relation of Classism and Racism.*

Michael Laub ~ *Secularized Sweden and Religious America: Comparison of Religion in Social Life.*

Future Issues Needing Attention

Adjusting Curriculum for International Students

The one curricular change noted above is but a single part of a series of adjustments that should be considered in adapting the IS Minor program to the needs and capacities of ISU's international students. International students comprise around 7 percent of all ISU students; last fall there were over 600 international undergraduates. Yet international students rarely declare the IS Minor. If we were to attract only 5 percent of them, it would double enrollments in the program while providing these students with a rich educational experience and useful credential added to their major fields of study. Many international students come to ISU with multiple capabilities in foreign languages. Should we insist on the same language study requirements as we hold for our American students? Should courses with American content be allowed as electives? The IS-AB will be discussing these and other adjustments in the fall semester, and we welcome the ideas and suggestions of all IS–AF members regarding this issue.

The New Department of Multidisciplinary Studies

Although we now have much better understanding of the new structure within which the ISP will be administered, including assurance that our current bylaws will continue to prevail, this new department will be a complicated department with several moving parts (seven programs altogether) and may well present unexpected challenges to the faculty leadership of the ISP. If so, we will have to wait until these unfold and cope with problems as they arise. I believe the past year has shown that the IS faculty are sufficiently resilient and capable of surmounting any difficulties that come our way.

Appendix ~ ISU Policy on Study Abroad and Federally Sponsored Financial Aid

Confirmed by Provost Williams on 9 April, 2014

1. Students who are engaged in study abroad through programs officially supported by ISU have no role in transmitting the official records of their work in these programs. Official records (transcripts or grade reports) are provided by the host institutions or the coordinating organizations and are transmitted directly to the ISU administration. These records are provided according to external calendars that ISU has no control over and will often arrive with considerable delay. It is not reasonable to expect them always to have been received before the start of students' subsequent courses at ISU following their study abroad program. Delays may be as much as a few months.

2. Once the records have been received, financial aid for students will be disbursed. But until records come in, ISU will assist students with bridge financing in two ways.

First, payment of tuition and fees can be delayed with no late penalty, understanding that payment will be made once aid is disbursed.

Second, ISU will provide interest-free short-term loans of up to \$2,000 for students who need such support to buy books, make rent payments and cover other typical expenses related to getting their subsequent program of studies underway. These loans are secured by the expected financial aid and will be repaid when aid is disbursed, pending receipt of the study abroad records.

3. Some kinds of alternative documents providing evidence of student participation in a study abroad program might be sufficient to allow disbursement of financial aid, even though official transcripts or grade reports have not been received. This point was discussed in the meeting of 3 February 2014, but faculty from International Studies found this prospect to be vague and confusing and thus not appropriate for a standard operating procedure. We need a clear SOP that can be explained to students in the process of advising them with respect to both academic and financial aspects of pursuing study abroad. If students want to procure such alternative documents and use them to seek disbursement of financial aid, that is fine, but it is their choice and not required.

4. Preparing students for study abroad should follow a well structured procedure of advising, which involves preliminary planning, detailed academic advising and thorough explanation of financial aspects so that students are well-informed about what they should expect. Students and their advisors should strive to coordinate the courses they pursue during study abroad with their degree and foundational study programs at ISU. These are matters that should be handled by the relevant academic authorities, i.e. the Office of Academic Programs Abroad, standard faculty academic advising in students' major and minor programs, and appropriate liaison with the Coordinator of Foundational Studies. The critical role of the Office of Student Financial Aid is to explain opportunities and restrictions on financial aid as it relates to study abroad programs.