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## The Benefits of Using StudioAbroad

What is most important to your study abroad office? Is it spending time finding the right programs for your students and growing your programs—or—is it spending time filing papers and answering phone calls about what application materials have been received? The answer is easy—nobody wants to spend time on administrative work. StudioAbroad allows you to focus on what is of value to your clientele while helping you manage the growth of your study abroad or international studies office.

### **You can't afford not to have StudioAbroad!**<sup>1</sup>

An investment in StudioAbroad returns value to a study abroad office in multiple ways.

Investing in StudioAbroad allows universities and program providers to reduce or avoid other expenses. The largest expenses of any study abroad office are those related to staffing – salaries, benefits, training, computers, etc. StudioAbroad makes it possible to offer more programs and serve increasing numbers of students without increasing your staff. It relieves workload problems in overworked, understaffed offices.

StudioAbroad allows your professional staff to focus their time on improving the quality of programs and the quality of students' experiences. Too much of their time is spent on low value administrative tasks. By managing your office's activities using StudioAbroad, you eliminate many of these tasks and shift responsibility to students for many others. It eliminates staff time in finding and distributing program brochures and other forms and materials the students need. It eliminates a majority of the emails and phone calls from students asking "What do I need to do? When do I need to do it? Have you received my [*application, deposit, professor's recommendation, etc., etc.*]. The result of this is the entire staff in the study abroad office has more time to focus on the really important aspects – improving program offerings, expanding participation, and preparing participants to get the most from their experience.

StudioAbroad reduces printing and mailing costs. What do you spend annually to print program brochures, application forms, program questionnaires, etc? How many are thrown out because they become outdated? How much staff time is spent managing your inventory of forms? How much do you spend annually to mail forms to students? (And how much do they spend to mail them back?)

Very notably, StudioAbroad allows your study abroad office to present a sophisticated and professional image. With StudioAbroad you can publish enticing, photo-rich program brochures for online viewing or attractive printing. Attracting students to participate in your programs depends on providing well-designed program information -- that is easy to find -- that can be accessed at their convenience<sup>2</sup> – and reduces confusion and red-tape. There are a lot of administrative requirements to apply to a study abroad program. Make your office "easy to do business with" and keep students engaged throughout the process. StudioAbroad simplifies what otherwise seems to be never-ending bureaucratic procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> "You can't afford not to have StudioAbroad!" was an actual response made by a StudioAbroad client to the study abroad director of another university who was wondering if they could afford StudioAbroad.

<sup>2</sup> Is your office open at 1:00 a.m. when prospective applicants may want to investigate your programs?

## You can't afford to build your own!

StudioAbroad's features and capabilities are designed and built based on the needs of its clients. Over the last 7 years the combined ideas of all StudioAbroad clients have made StudioAbroad more robust, more flexible and more complete than any single office could have designed into an internally developed application.

- ◆ In 2000, UNC-Chapel Hill asked Terra Dotta to develop a custom application for their study abroad office. A team of seven programmers, database experts, graphic artists, and designers worked for 18 months to implement this custom application. This turned out to be the starting point for StudioAbroad. Today, to build the features in StudioAbroad as a custom application an institution should expect to invest over \$500,000 and take 2-3 years to develop.
- ◆ A university spent \$80,000 to develop an application internally. But it wasn't finished! They are now a StudioAbroad client. It would have cost more to complete their internal development effort than to license StudioAbroad – and the internal application would have had less functionality!
- ◆ One large university contracted with their IT group two years ago to develop a database and integrated system for their study abroad office. Currently, the project is far over budget (they did not share their budget or over-spend) and behind schedule. After a demo of StudioAbroad at NAFSA the assistant director of the study abroad office stated, "This software was perfect. It addressed all of our needs and many of our wants. We were shocked, but unfortunately we were too far along with our in-house project to consider it."<sup>3</sup> The software most likely would have saved us a great deal in the long-run." She went on to say that it was highly unlikely that the in-house system, when finished, would be as dynamic and efficient as StudioAbroad.

Once developed, internal applications carry high maintenance costs. The "first release" of the application will not address all your needs. Continued investment, usually at significant cost, will be needed to add critical and desired features. Fixing problems requires the availability of programmers skilled in the application's programming language, knowledge about the application and an understanding of your operations. Programming staff turnover can cause a significant risk to continued operations of the study abroad office. Here are some common stories from study abroad offices:

- ◆ One university employs a full-time person, with salary and benefits costing \$60,000 annually, who is dedicated to modifying and supporting their custom application.
- ◆ A university has an Access database to track all student applications. "We hired a graduate student to develop our database. Now it's broken and he is no longer at the university. Nobody else knows anything about the application."
- ◆ Another is in a similar situation. "We have a homegrown Oracle/FileMaker application. The developer left and it's now a mess!"

If you custom develop an application, it will cost more to build, cost more to support, take longer to implement, have less functionality and come at a higher risk to your office. You can't afford to build your own!

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<sup>3</sup> If you find yourself in a similar 'We've spent too much, we can't stop now' situation, ask your business school to conduct a sunk-cost analysis. You will learn that what you have spent doesn't matter. What matters is how much you still need to spend to get the functionality you need.

The sunk cost fallacy is sometimes known as the "Concorde Effect", referring to the fact that the British and French continued to fund the joint development of Concorde even after it became apparent that there was no longer an economic case for the aircraft.

## How do you convince your institution to proceed?

It's pretty easy for the leadership and staff of the study abroad office to see the value and importance of using StudioAbroad. However, it is likely that many groups and individuals will need to be involved in a purchase decision. Purchase procedures vary from one institution to the next. You will need to know and follow your institution's procedures.

The first key questions are, of course, where will the funding come from and who needs to be involved in approving it. You will need to 'make your case' for acquiring StudioAbroad. This generally involves identifying the current situation [current program size, growth, staffing, objectives, etc.], the challenges with the current situation, and how implementing StudioAbroad will solve these challenges and contribute to a higher performing program. In some cases this may be an informal, verbal discussion with those who need to be involved in the decision to install StudioAbroad. In most cases it requires a more formal approach possibly with a written proposal.

Those who may need to be involved include:

- ◆ The Registrar's Office will want to understand how student information will be used (and protected) when StudioAbroad is integrated to your student information system.
- ◆ Your IT group will need to understand the requirements for installing and operating StudioAbroad in your data center. They will want to conduct an assessment of how StudioAbroad fits with your technology and data management standards.
- ◆ Your legal counsel will want to review the license agreement.

A good approach is to have individual discussions with each of these stakeholders to gain their support and answer their questions. You can then follow this up with a meeting to present your recommendation to everyone who needs to be involved. This works really well to generate excitement, commitment and forward momentum. The group meeting is a great time to schedule a product demonstration so all the stakeholders can gain a firm understanding of the value of StudioAbroad and the steps involved in its implementation.