

FEATURE STORY

Opportunities Abound for Students to Study in Foreign Countries

By Joan Wilder

It's like a bonus, really: You apply to Bridgewater State College, you get accepted, you're in, you're set, and then, if you want – and it works for you – you can spend a semester, a year, or a week studying at another college or university in almost any country in the world – while staying matriculated at BSC and working toward your degree.

Although most colleges offer international study programs, Bridgewater has one of the most extensive menus of overseas study opportunities among the commonwealth's state colleges.

"I sit on the board of the Massachusetts Council for International Education, which is made up of people from all the different state institutions ... and a lot of schools really covet our programs," said Dr. Julia Davis, director of international programs at Bridgewater.

"They see we've got strong backing from the administration and a lot of focus from faculty," Dr. Davis said. "We are doing a great job – we still have a long way to go, but we're growing exponentially. This past fall, we sent 100 students abroad ... and had 16 students on exchange here."

International programs are broadly divided into three categories: study tours, exchange programs and study-abroad programs. Study tours are distinct from the other two in that they are three-credit, short trips (one to three weeks) led by a BSC professor.

Exchange and study-abroad are umbrella terms that refer to programs through which students study in a foreign country for a semester or a year. The basic difference between the two designations is the way they are administered and how the student pays for them.

"With exchange programs, a student pays tuition and fees as though they were at BSC, but their body goes somewhere else," said Dr. Davis. "It's sort of a swap, we're taking a student from this other place, and we send a student – almost a one-on-one swap. Students who go on study-abroad programs, on the other hand, pay tuition and other costs directly to the foreign institutions.

Bridgewater has exchange agreements with schools in England, Ireland, Canada, Brazil, Japan, Hong Kong and Jordan. Cape Verde will likely be added to the list soon. "For study-abroad programs, BSC works with a number of providers, nonprofits and other institutions that organize study abroad in many countries," said Dr. Davis.

Among BSC's most prestigious exchange programs is the Killam Fellowship program, which involves exchanges among 12 American colleges and universities and 10 in Canada. Students who are chosen as Killam Fellows receive \$10,000 if they are doing a yearlong exchange and \$5,000 for a half year.

"It's an elite group of schools," said Dr. Anthony Cicerone,

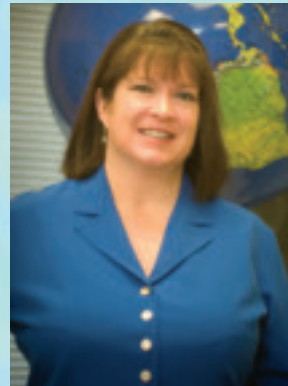
professor of economics and director of BSC's Canadian Studies Program. "BSC is definitely the most active of any of the schools involved. Every year (for the past five years), we've sent two students a year and had at least one incoming student."

Hannah Renglich, one of this year's Killam Fellows, is on exchange from Glendon College, York University, Canada. Ms. Renglich's extensive extracurricular activities at BSC include singing with the college chorale and chamber singers and volunteering at Colchester Farm, an organic grower.

Among BSC's rarest international programs is its study-abroad program for student teachers.

"We're unique in that we offer – for qualified students – the opportunity to do half their student teaching in England," said Dr. Davis. "Eight weeks abroad and eight weeks at home." BSC has also had exchange students doing half their student teaching in Mexico.

After 20 years of working with international study programs, Dr. Davis retains tremendous enthusiasm for their value. "I tell students it is a life-changing experience. I have never had a student come to me afterward and say that was a



Dr. Julia Davis

waste of time and resources ... but, I have had students come back and rave. It changes a person's perspective of themselves and the world and makes them very marketable to employers.

"It shows a potential employer that they are flexible, they are culturally diverse, that they are risk takers, and that sets them apart from all other graduates within their major," said Dr. Davis. "I think in the United States we have a tendency to be so insulated, and being able to see a different perspective is very healthy." ■

Joan Wilder is a Boston-based freelance journalist and writer.

By far, the largest scholarship funding for BSC student exchange or study programs – about \$70,000 per year – comes from the school's foundation account and is used for student study trips. Only two other scholarships for studying abroad are available strictly to Bridgewater State College students. They are the Hart-McFarland Fund for International Study and the Bristol County Savings Bank Endowed Fund for Study Abroad.

Depending on the type of exchange or study abroad program a student is considering – and there are dozens – various scholarships unique to the particular program may be available.

BSC students are also allowed to use their financial aid to study abroad, which isn't true of all colleges and universities.