



Transcript

Welcome:

Claire: On behalf of the Gilman Scholarship Program, thank you so much for joining the Study Abroad for Students with Disabilities Web Symposium. My name is Claire Thornton; I'm an Assistant Manager here at the Gilman Scholarship Program. This year the Gilman Program is rolling out a series of web symposiums covering a wide range of relevant and significant topics in education abroad. We're bring together lots of great speakers who have a wealth of information and knowledge to share and the this is our first web symposium and we're very excited to have several important people with us today.

Presenters:

Today I'm joined by Ashley Bryant from Mobility International USA at the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange and we're also going to hear from Heidi Soneson, Program Director at the Learning Abroad Center at the University of Minnesota. And lastly, I'll interview Gilman Scholar, Connie Rivera, about her experience studying abroad in Brazil in 2012.

Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program:

Before we get started with the rest of the presenters today, I'd like to talk briefly about the Gilman Scholarship Program. The Gilman Scholarship Program is sponsored by the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and the U.S. Department of State. ECA leads a wide range of exchanges with the goal of increasing mutual understanding and respect between people of the United States and people of other countries. You'll hear shortly about some other projects that ECA sponsors. They sponsor a great number of programs. So, if you haven't already, please look at the many programs that they offer.

The Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program is administered by the Institute of International Education (IIE), out of IIE's Houston office. And our mission is to diversify the kinds of students who study and intern abroad and the countries and regions where they go. We look at diversity in the broadest sense. We really want diversity to shine through in terms of how the United States is represented abroad. We are trying to encourage students of high financial need who are receiving the Pell grant, students who are normally underrepresented in education abroad, to help them take advantage of the opportunity to do so. The Gilman Scholarship Program's encouragement of diversity includes students with disabilities, but also students with diverse ethnic background, students who attend minority serving institutions or community colleges, first generation college students, students studying STEM majors: science, technology, engineering and math students, among other things. And in light of our mission here at the Gilman Scholarship Program we're bringing you today information about study abroad for students with disabilities. And without further ado, I'll introduce Ashley Bryant who is going to talk about the work they do at Mobility International USA.

Study Abroad with a Disability:

ASHLEY: Thanks so much, Claire. I'd like to start off saying how excited I am to present with Gilman again. As Claire mentioned, my name is Ashley Bryant and I'm a Project Coordinator with Mobility International USA, you might know us

better as MIUSA. Here at MIUSA, I work on a project called the National Clearinghouse with Disability and Exchange and today I'd like to introduce you to some of the resources that we offer through that project which can really be useful to students with disabilities, as well as their international exchange advisors.

National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE):

So like the Gilman Scholarship itself, the NCDE Project is sponsored by the ECA which Claire talked a little bit about and that's because the ECA not only wants more people to get involved in international exchange between the U.S. and other countries in general, but they want a wider range of diversity among those who participate and by diversity, you know, Claire shared some examples and that includes people with disabilities, whether those disabilities are apparent or non-apparent. So what is a non-apparent disability? In case you're wondering, it means that you can't just tell a person has a disability just by looking at them. In fact, most people who have disabilities have a non-apparent disability such as dyslexia or other learning disabilities. Health conditions like diabetes or chronic fatigue. Mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, Asperger's, but there are many more examples. To help reach that goal of promoting the participation of people with disabilities and study abroad, and in other types of international exchange, the ECA sponsors our NCDE project and that way we're able to offer free advising and resources to anyone who seeks them out, usually that means individuals with disabilities, who are getting ready to go abroad or maybe just considering it, as well as exchange providers and study abroad advisors.

As this slide indicates, some of what we offer includes free advising and referrals. We have a variety of tip sheets on different kinds of disability and exchange related topics. We also include stories that are written by people with disabilities who share their experiences abroad with us and their peers. What the NCDE does not do, we do not actually run any exchange programs. Nor do we provide financial aid or scholarships. However, we do recognize that a lot of people with disabilities need that information. And therefore, we try and research any organizations or resources out there that we can refer you to that do provide exchange programs or financial aid.

Where Do People with Disabilities Go Abroad?:

So one of the most common questions that we get besides how to find scholarships for study abroad is: "I'm a person with a disability, so where can I go?" The answer depends on you. Keep in mind that people with different types of disabilities have traveled almost everywhere you can think of from Jordan to China, to Costa Rica, to Ghana, to Australia, and many other destinations as well. I was just showing photos of people with diverse disabilities who have sent us photos of themselves studying and working and volunteering in the countries that I mentioned. Some of the people on this chat today might have a friend or family member with a disability who has studied abroad.

Preparing to Go Abroad:

If you're in the early stages of studying abroad, in other words, maybe you're just thinking about where you'd like to go, or whether you'd like to go. What exactly you'd like to do, what countries interest you, my first tip for you is to choose a program not solely based on what you think will be quote-unquote best for your disability. But to choose one that meets your educational goals, your professional goals, and your personal goals.

That's not to say that you should completely ignore your disability related needs, if you have any, while you're preparing to go abroad. Because it's important to plan ahead for how you will get what you need in order to fully participate in your experience. So, if you're going to be going on an exchange program, you might want to consider disclosing your disability early on. Ideally, once you've been accepted into the program of your choice. By doing that ahead of time, that will give your advisors and the other program coordinators some time to learn from you how they can make the program accessible to you. It will also give them some time to resolve any accessibility gaps in the program. And remember, there are many components of an exchange program, not just the study or internship itself. But there's also housing or transportation to consider. Some programs offer day trips and excursions and cultural site visits in addition

to the study and internship itself. It's also your opportunity to ask questions and to advocate for yourself. You might want to know what should I do if I need to take a rest day due to my chronic fatigue or, if I'm struggling with my anxiety or bipolar, is there someone I can talk to. Some students with disabilities will find it really helpful to learn about the details of the program schedule day by day or sometimes even broken down into parts of the day in order to plan for disability related needs. These are things to consider and to check in with the study abroad staff about. Don't forget to also check in with disability services staff at your university or college. Even if you don't think you'll really need anything from them. You might be surprised that they might have some helpful resources to give to you or other tips or ways that they can support your study abroad staff. And it's also especially important to understand your rights both at home and abroad as an international exchange participant. One of the tip sheets that we have on our web site addresses specifically that issue. So I'd highly encourage you to check that out.

And of course as you're preparing to go abroad, please contact us at MIUSA. You can reach us by e mailing clearinghouse@miusa.org. Or you can visit us online at MIUSA.org/ncde.

The MIUSA Website:

So some of examples of what you'll find on our Web site are ideal resources for people with disabilities who are regardless of what stage they're at in the study abroad or internship abroad process our going abroad page has a guide to international exchange for Americans with disabilities on a variety of topics.

Some examples of our resources include finding opportunities abroad. This is a great way just to see what's out there, see what kinds of things people are doing, people with and without disabilities. If you're not sure where you want to go, what kind of projects you want to do while you're overseas, check it out. I mentioned that funding and scholarships and financial aid is very popular question that we get. So we do include information about how people with disabilities can fund their exchange experience, including examples of specific scholarship, Gilman of course being a big one. As well as tips for fundraising, some people with disabilities receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Funding that can sometimes be applied to a study abroad experience. We have information related to all that on the funding page.

As I mentioned earlier, it's important to understand your legal rights as an international exchange participant with a disability. Please review our tip sheet on that in order to be a better advocate for yourself. Our Disclosing your Disability and Negotiating Accommodations page is a helpful resource for deciding whether how to and to whom you will disclose your disability and also if you will require any disability related accommodations. There's strategies and tips for how to negotiate what you need in order to fully access your exchange experience. And of course we have plenty of tips for getting ready to go abroad. Many of these are shared with us by other people with disabilities who have wanted to pass along their strategies for navigating their foreign country and for navigating being in an intercultural setting. And finally our Disability-Specific Information is where you can find tip sheets related to different travel topics such as airline travel to health insurance to cultural differences, as well as specific disability tips. If you're a person who needs a sign language interpreter or you're a person who uses a wheelchair or mobility aid or you're a person with a mental health related condition, these are just some examples of all the different kinds of tips and tip sheets we have. This is a reminder that in addition to resources for people with disabilities themselves, our website has a variety of tools for their study abroad advisors and exchange organization providers. I didn't go into specifics with those, but I know we might have some advisors and program coordinators on our webinar today and so I'd like them to be aware of a whole section of our website that we have just for them for advising students with disabilities as well as for recruiting and including people with disabilities.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

I want to share some examples of common questions that people often ask us and that we can try to assist you with. These include how to balance the individual's needs with what's available in their destination country - that might mean

assistive technology to finding accessible housing and other examples like that. They ask us about how to find information about resources abroad. One way that we address this is we try and refer them to some local disability organizations in the country that might be able to provide some resources that were not previously considered. And it's a great way to connect to the local disability community in the country as well. We often receive a question about if students have a pre-existing condition, how they can find international travel health insurance to cover them while they are on their international exchange experience. We do have a tip sheet on that as well. Accessibility of the host destination and more information related to that. And of course, financial aid funding and scholarships. If there are questions that are not listed here, of course please ask us, we can try and direct you to anything that could be helpful in your research and we might even know some other people who have had the same questions and it might be possible for us to either put you in touch with them or share any insights that they've had during their experiences.

Funding Your Exchange:

So just because funding is such a popular question, I just wanted to briefly touch upon some of the things that we offer. We have a page related to examples of scholarships especially ones that promote diversity in study abroad. We list examples of these such as the Gilman, Fund for Education Abroad, the Christiansen grant and there are others. Again for those students with disabilities who receive SSI or VR funds, please review our tip sheet for how those can be applied towards study abroad related expenses. Some people with disabilities have used their funds from that towards renting a golf cart for someone who has mobility disability and needs to get across a big campus to helping pay for books or other services or goods that they need for their exchange. Some disability organizations offer scholarships as well for students with disabilities. They are usually not related to study abroad but can often be applied towards those experiences if the student receives credit for them. So we list some examples of disability organizations that provide disability related scholarships. Just to serve as a reminder, that really any scholarship is potentially a scholarship for people with disabilities. I say that because so many people say I have a disability, are there any scholarships out there for deaf students or are there any scholarships out there for visually impaired students? We want those people to know yes, there are some organizations that award scholarships specific to a particular disability, but are you remembering to also apply for Gilman? Are you remembering to apply for Fulbright? Are you remembering to apply for these great opportunities that want more diverse applicants to get involved? And if you're not, be sure to do that - it's a great opportunity.

Stay Updated:

Stay updated with MIUSA and our National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange resources. We often share updates about opportunities to go abroad. Funding opportunities that we learn about, plus we update all of our social media with new resources that we have, new stories about disabled travelers. You can find us on our Facebook, Twitter, we have great videos on YouTube, subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter, or check out our blog. And so once again, my name is Ashley, but if you e-mail us at clearinghouse@miusa.org, I or my team members can help respond to any of your questions. You're also welcome to contact us with tips and of course we love to hear stories about your travel experiences as well. We look forward to hearing from you. And once again, thank you so much for this opportunity to share about our resources and thank you, Claire.

Access Abroad: A Team Approach to Assisting Students with Disabilities Interested in Study Abroad:

CLAIRE: Thanks, so much, Ashley. Now I'd like to introduce Heidi, the Program Director from the University of Minnesota. She's going to talk about how they support students with disabilities to study abroad.

HEIDI: Thank you so much, Claire. University of Minnesota has developed and recommends a collaborative effort between the education abroad office and disability services. To ensure that students with disabilities have comprehensive advising support to assist them in selecting a program, identifying accommodation possibilities and preparing for their experience overseas.

University of Minnesota Institutional Overview:

University of Minnesota sends approximately 2,500 students abroad nationally. We have about 2,000 registered students with disabilities and approximately 35 students with disabilities study abroad who disclose to us.

The materials that I'll be sharing in this PowerPoint were initially developed as a result of the U.S. Department of Education grant and institutions across the country and around the world are welcome to utilize the resources on our website for their own students and for their advising purposes.

Presentation Overview:

In this presentation I will address four key areas, first I will outline the roles of key individuals who should be involved in advising the advising process for students with disabilities who would like to study abroad. I will then discuss the recommended advising process in order to assist the student in identifying appropriate accommodations, needs and possibilities. I'll then look at the considerations to keep in mind when advising students and for students to keep in mind as they look at study abroad options. I'll outline some of the resources that are available to advisors and students for this process.

Definition of Disability:

The Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA of 1990 and subsequent amendments to the act in 2008 provide guidance with the definition of what a disability is. While some disabilities are apparent or visible, the majority of people have invisible disabilities. Keep in mind that some individuals may be reluctant to disclose a disability because of the stigma associated with having a disability.

Types of Disabilities and Essential Qualifications:

The most prevalent invisible disabilities are mental health and learning disabilities, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, ADHD and other chronic health conditions. While an invisible disability may not be apparent, the impact of the condition is real. Keep in mind that the student must meet the standard criteria of the overseas program. Disability accommodations are designed to provide access to individuals who meet the academic or other key criteria expected of all participants. It is the responsibility of the student to make his or her accommodation needs known in a timely manner.

Accommodation Triangle:

When determining and arranging reasonable accommodations for a student with a disability, we typically use an accommodation triangle that includes the student, the disability services advisor and the faculty or education abroad advisor. When a student with a disability is planning for an education abroad experience, this model also includes the overseas contact. Each of these people has a key role in the accommodation process.

Roles of the Student and Study Abroad Advisor:

The student with guidance from the study abroad office should explore study abroad options that meet his or her particular academic and personal needs. It is important that the student in consultation with the study abroad advisor confirm that he can meet the essential components of the program with or without reasonable accommodations. This includes academic requirements as well as many required program activities. Once one or more sides have been identified, the student should work with his disability services advisor to complete an accommodations request form. I'll provide an example of that form later in the presentation. This form helps identify the accommodations that the student will need overseas. In that process, the student discloses the needs at least 8 weeks in advance, ideally, and

should be certain to confirm prior to departure the exact accommodations that will be provided on site. The student should also gather information about overseas disability support offices in the country where he or she plans to study in order to be more informed about the attitudes and guidelines of that country and the resources that Ashley has outlined from Mobility International can be very helpful in this area.

For the study abroad advisor the process is in many ways the same as advising any student who is studying abroad. Since disability needs will vary with each student it's best to focus on the student's academic and personal interests first when selecting one or more possible study abroad locations. The completed accommodations request form will help the student disability services and the study abroad advisor identify the student accommodation needs and this will further refine which study abroad locations are feasible. It's the responsibility of the study abroad advisor to share the completed accommodation request form with the overseas site or program provider in order to determine what accommodations are possible abroad. It's also important to consult with the faculty leader, if there is one for the program, regarding the student's accommodation needs so that everyone participates in the advising process. Most accommodations, such as extra time on tests, do not require special funding. In some cases where funding might be needed the study abroad office should consult with disability services and in some cases the general counsel's office to determine the extent of any funding obligation and resources.

Roles of the Disability Specialist and Overseas Staff:

For the disability services office, the staff are responsible for completing the accommodation request form with the student and sharing it with the study abroad advisor. The disability services advisors are responsible for serving as an access resource to both the student and the study abroad advisor. The overseas staff are responsible for reviewing the accommodation request form and notifying the US organization or institution of the kinds of accommodations that are possible. In some cases there may need to be creative solutions or further consultation if not all of the accommodations can be provided. In some cases, creative thinking may include relocating a classroom; it could be that there are other ways of providing course material. So there is usually a dialogue back and forth to determine what is feasible. In some cases a student may not disclose until arriving overseas and discovering that accommodations are needed. In this case, the overseas sight, the U.S. study abroad advisor, disabilities services and the student will be involved in determining whether reasonable accommodations are possible.

Common Accommodations Abroad:

The most common accommodations abroad are exam accommodations. This may include extra time to take an exam and/or private testing environment. Course work related to accommodations may include flexible deadlines or limiting how many exams a student can take in a day. Classroom accommodations could include reserved seating by a door or in a classroom, an adapted chair for lumbar support or an adjustable height table in a science lab. Policy accommodations may include taking a reduced course load. Housing accommodations may include having a private room, an accessible room or specifically location for accessibilities purposes. Excursion accommodations may include providing accessible transportation to the excursion location or identifying alternative excursion destinations when feasible, particularly if there are a number of students needing accommodations regarding excursions.

Additional Considerations:

Additional considerations to keep in mind are that a growing number of students with or without disabilities have ongoing medical needs. It is important that students bring their medication with them in their carry-on bag for the full duration of their time abroad as identical medications are often not available overseas. Increasing numbers of students are also requesting counseling services while overseas. It is wise for overseas organizations and institutions to have the names of reputable counselors available for students. Students who are travel to non-English speaking locations should be reminded that counseling in English might not be available and then in this case they may wish to make arrangements to Skype with their U.S. counselor.

Students with significant physical disabilities who use a personal care attendant for activities of daily living will typically need the same assistance when they are abroad. The disability services advisor will be able to identify the need for this assistance and can explore funding options with the student. In addition, it will be important to clarify the role of the personal care assistant while abroad and determine who will pay for the travel expenses of this individual. Funding for the expenses of the personal care assistant needs to be determined by the student and disability services prior to the student's departure. Deaf or hard of hearing students may need capturing or sign language interpreting in order to have access to full participation in the program. Disability services staff can assist the student with identifying resources for these services and to explore in-country options. As I mentioned Mobility International is also an excellent resource.

Encouraging Disclosure:

Regarding disclosure, if a student discloses a disability need with you, it is important to respect confidentiality and consider carefully who needs to be informed about the disability accommodation. Often only select overseas staff need to be informed. And it is important to consider with the student whom you plan to inform of an accommodation request. When speaking or corresponding with a student, it is important to keep the student's academic and education abroad interests as your primary advising focus. A student will be best served to select an education abroad program based on these criteria. In many cases a disability accommodation does not require significant changes on site and it is best to discuss accommodation needs after the student has been accepted to the program.

Creating a welcoming environment within the study abroad office will help encourage students to disclose their disabilities needs. This could include having posters and books related to accessibility openly available. When using the term disability, it is important to highlight the range of disability conditions that are covered and highlighting invisible disabilities. An example of this is provided on the slide. Students also report it is helpful to hear examples of how accommodation needs are resolved or addressed overseas and examples of creative problem solving that led to successful accommodation solutions.

Resources:

The [University of Minnesota access abroad website](#) provides forms, outlines of processes and procedures and resources that have been effective for working collaboratively with disability services and the students with disabilities. The [accommodation request form](#) on the next slide is a tool for facilitating communication between the student, disability services, and the education abroad program and overseas site. The next slide shows a [student checklist](#) that was designed as a tool to assist students with understanding his or her role in the accommodation process. In addition there is information about access at overseas sites that we manage in the learning abroad center and other professional resources.

Student Experiences:

I'd like to give just a couple of short examples to help illustrate the kind of accommodations that we have provided recently. A student whom I'll call Joseph elected to study in Norway, as an example. He notified us approximately two weeks prior to departure that he needed extra time on tests, he needed to have also syllabi available to him electronically and he may need to sit at the front of the room in order to successfully complete note taking. We weren't certain what would be possible on such notice as we encourage students to disclose 8 weeks prior to departure, so we discussed with our disabilities services office how to proceed and then contacted the overseas institution to find out what was possible. The response back from Norway was that the institution was able to make most of the accommodations, extra time on tests in general would be possible, not all courses had syllabi electronically available. But as long as the student was flexible in his course work selection, the overseas site felt the accommodation could be

accommodated and supported. The student in this case did study abroad, was flexible about the courses he needed to take and had a very successful experience.

In Italy, Mary and Sally participated in a study abroad program, both required medication while abroad. In both cases the students did not bring their medication with them. In one case the student was able to consult with her counselor and determine that her learning disability could be managed successfully without the required medication because the medication itself was not available in country. And she proceeded with the program and the learning abroad center had written verification from the physician that it was appropriate and safe for her to proceed with the program even without her initially required medication. In the second case the student had narcolepsy and depression and did need medication and the learning abroad center worked with the student to try to identify equivalent medication and whether there was an option to have the medication refilled in Italy. In this case we were able to make accommodations but it was certainly a situation where it would be very helpful in the future for students to notify the study abroad office in advance and determine whether they are able to bring their medication or whether the medication is accessible abroad because in some cases exact medication is simply not available in the host country.

Finally, Peter arrived in India having disclosed that he needed some mobility accommodations but he didn't feel that they required any prior notification and would not require extensive modifications once in country. Upon arrival to the program, we determined with the student once we had a better sense of what was the condition in India that more significant accommodations would be needed. At that point, we determined whether we could provide the accommodation and as it turned out, we were able to make modifications particularly to the excursion either by providing assistance to the student when he needed to access places that did not have ramps or other easily accessible entrances or to identify an alternative excursion that would meet the same educational goals but be more accessible to the student.

Student Reminders:

So the important student reminders that come from this advising process is that advanced planning is one of the most important aspects. Disclosing at least 8 weeks prior to departure, providing full disclosure through the accommodation request form is a very important part of allowing the learning abroad center, your study abroad office, the disability services office and the overseas site to identify the best possible accommodations and which sites are feasible. Being flexible on the location and having multiple study abroad program options available is advantageous. So that it is possible to determine which site can provide the best accommodation support.

Communication is also key. Checking in with the study abroad office with disability services office and making sure you also are clear as a student what exact accommodations can be provided abroad is an essential part of the process. And once you are on site, being in contact with the on-site staff to discuss your needs and ensure that you have the ongoing support during the study abroad program is another important form communication.

Advisor Considerations:

For the advisor, we feel it is important to know what your role is in the accommodation process, and to seek out consultation. If you're in the study abroad office, knowing that disability services is an area where they have a great deal of expertise and can provide support will be very helpful to you. When explore exploring overseas options with a student, provide all the options not just the ones you know are flexible and accessible. Even when a student discloses on short notice creative solutions may not involve significant modifications to the overseas program. Know what processes and procedures to follow within your office. Know that creative problem solving will yield some of the best accommodations solutions. And remember that a student is just like with a disability is just like other students and will have similar worries and excitement along with the need to plan for disability accommodations. Study abroad can be unsettling for all students, not just those with disabilities. Finally, study abroad students often forget that the Americans with Disabilities Act does not follow them abroad and that different countries will have varying degrees of support for

students with disabilities. Keep in mind that students can have a successful experience best if they are plan and use creative problem solving skills.

Gilman Scholar Connie Rivera:

CLAIRE: Great, thank you so much Heidi for that information on how you all work together at the University of Minnesota to encourage students with disabilities to study abroad. We really appreciate your perspective, so thank you so much for that. Now I'm going to introduce Connie Rivera. She was a Gilman scholar who studied abroad in 2012. Thank you for joining us today, Connie. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

CONNIE: Yes, I went to the University of California, Berkeley. I was in Brazil, fall 2012. I have my degree with a major in Political Economy.

Claire: Great, thank you so much. Why did you decide to study abroad, Connie, and why did you decide to take that on?

CONNIE: I felt like studying abroad gave me different experiences than what I read from books, and I felt like Brazil was a perfect country for me because my major was Globalization in Latin America. And Brazil was a perfect choice because it's the forefront of globalization and is the number one developing country in the world.

CLAIRE: Yeah, I definitely agree with you that studying abroad is a valuable firsthand experience and it sounds like Brazil fit perfectly with your major. I think as you know, and as many people know, for the Gilman Scholarship program it's key that applicants make the case for their program being the right fit and it sounds like yours was, Connie, which is great, we love to see that. Connie, did you receive any accommodations while you were abroad?

CONNIE: Yes, I had a couple: I had note takers for the class, I had more time, and also, the directors put me in housing close to school. I was about a block away from the school which really helped. And also, in my housing, I had help cleaning and cooking.

CLAIRE: Okay. How did you prepare for those accommodations before you left?

CONNIE: I talked with my program leaders from UC Berkeley and together we created an accommodation list for study abroad and I brought that along with me.

CLAIRE: That sounds great. You received the accommodations you needed because you were prepared with information and you worked with your home school. That's really great. Can you tell me what challenges you faced while you were studying abroad?

CONNIE: Yes. So, of course, Latin America is a developing country. So I knew going in that it was going to be hard because disability in education aren't popular now in Latin America. But I wasn't prepared that the directors did not know how to accommodate me. They didn't know what a note taker was. So I had to explain every accommodation to my professors and try to coordinate all that by myself, which I wasn't prepared to do. But ultimately, I did. And of course the directors didn't know me, and they tried to put me in the 24-hour-care. And I felt like I didn't need it. It took a while but I proved to them that I only needed a little bit of help. I'm glad I trusted my gut in knowing what services I really needed and what services I did not.

CLAIRE: I think that's really great, Connie, that you were confident in your ability to really know what you needed and what you didn't. That's great that you worked with the program directors to help them understand exactly what you did need and what you didn't. That's really great. Can you tell me how the Gilman Scholarship impacted you?

CONNIE: Well it gave me the money I needed for the note takers and accommodations around the house and that really helped because I wasn't prepared for that. They told me when I got there, they were, like, "oh, you need to pay extra." So that really helped. Also it paid for my plane ticket and expenses that financial aid did not cover. It was nice.

CLAIRE: Good. Can you tell me why other students, and other disabled students should study abroad?

CONNIE: I always encourage everybody, but I feel like disabled students should study abroad. I know that exploring other countries and seeing what other cultures are really like and the adversity that they go through, it really encouraged me to kind of step outside of my comfort zone and be okay with it and be myself and not worry about what other people think. It is an educational experience. But I also it's a big leap. If you are a student, you should definitely take advantage, because that's the point in doing it. It can be a really big change, I loved it.

CLAIRE: Great, well thank you so much. Thanks for being with us today Connie and telling us about your experience in Brazil. Everyone thank you so much for being part of this presentation. Hopefully you can see that support does exist through places like MIUSA and institutional programs like Access Abroad at the University of Minnesota and financial support through the Gilman Scholarship to assist students with disabilities to access educational opportunities abroad. There's lots of support. Hopefully that's apparent. And there are some resources. We had it up before but I'd like to put it up again just in case you need to get this information down. We all have some great resources available so please check out MIUSA's Web site, Minnesota's Access Abroad website, and the Gilman Scholarship website because we really would like to help encourage students with disabilities to study abroad.

Questions:

Now I'd like to check in with my colleague Shawna. Shawna, do we have any questions from the crowd?

SHAWNA: We do. We have a couple coming in. The first one: I know that Heidi had mentioned the possibility of a personal care attendant on a study abroad program. But we have a student who wanted to know if it's possible or has happened in the past where students have brought a service animal to accompany them on their study abroad.

CLAIRE: Okay, Heidi can you maybe speak to that and maybe as well, Ashley.

HEIDI: Yes, I can say we have not encountered that at the University of Minnesota. I do know of situations where students have brought a service animal with them. It has taken good advance planning, because some countries, such as United Kingdom have quarantine regulations around animals coming into the country. And Ashley may, with her broad experience at MIUSA, may have examples from other students that she has worked with.

ASHLEY: I do. Yeah, this is Ashley. We have known many people who have brought service animals with them during their study abroad or other kinds of exchange programs in other countries. In addition to quarantine related policies and laws, I would encourage students who are considering bringing a service animal with them abroad to really understand the culture of the country where they wish to go. Some cultures and countries are very welcoming of dogs, while others might have more of a cultural based fear or animosity towards dogs due to religious reasons or cultural reasons. That's not to say that you can't always bring your service dog with you. But keep in mind that you might face certain barriers trying to bring your dog to a public place even if you have a legal right to do so, you might need to be prepared to advocate for yourself and be aware of the laws in that country. MIUSA does have a tip sheet on our website related to service animals, whether dogs or other types of animals, and bringing them with you on an exchange program. So I would encourage anyone who is considering that to check out that resource. What some students have done, also, who use service animals in the United States, at times they might use other strategies during their time abroad. They might use their cane more or might arrange for a sighted guide to accompany them in areas where it's less feasible to bring a service animal. However, contact us if that's something you're considering and we can try and work through some of the options with you.

CLAIRE: Thanks, Ashley, thank you, Heidi. Are there any more questions, Shawna that we can address?

SHAWNA: Sure, we have one more question, this will be for you, Claire, regarding the Gilman Scholarship. We have a student in there who is a senior and graduating in May of 2014 and wanted to know as a senior if she would still be eligible to apply for the scholarship.

CLAIRE: That's a great question. Here at Gilman you're welcome to apply as long as you're still an undergraduate student. Our Spring 2014 application is currently open and will close on October 1st. Please get in touch with us if you have any other questions, but we would welcome all and any applications.

SHAWNA: Thanks, Claire. We have one more question here. It says: I see a disconnect between the obligations of a U.S. based university and study abroad programs and the realities in a different in a particular country. Can you talk a little bit more about who pays for accommodations and what, if reasonable accommodations are not available, what happens if they're not available or possible.

CLAIRE: Heidi or Ashley, do you have anything to add? That might be great.

ASHLEY: Yeah, this is Ashley. I can speak to that as well. That's a great question that comes up a lot. And you're right, the reality is that not all the same accommodations or equipment or services will be available in the host destination as what the student is used to receiving in the United States. I think what's most important, Heidi talked about the responsibilities of the student and the responsibilities of the program coordinators, it's really important for the student to not only be flexible but to realize that going to another country opens them up to a lot of changes and that could also include changes in what's possible as far as receiving accommodations. For the study abroad advisor, their responsibility is to, well, two things, to make a good faith effort to provide what is needed or alternatives that could somehow still help meet the access needs of the student even if they're different from what the student usually uses. The other responsibility is to not overpromise to the student what is available. That can open up the institution to some various problems. I think what's most important is a frank discussion between the student and the study abroad provider or advisor, letting them know what options there are, but also how will the student be flexible if what they currently use are not available.

As far as financial obligations I would say that we would recommend here at MIUSA that institutions try to commit at least pooling the financial expenses between the home institution study abroad, the home institution disability services office, and then the host institution offices as well. Between all those different resources, hopefully they can come up with a funding to at least match the same amount that what the expenses that students use at their home campus. That's not always 100% feasible, but I think the institution does have a responsibility to make a good faith effort to find opportunities to close any access gaps. Heidi, do you have anything to add?

HEIDI: I think those are very good points, Ashley. I might add that Ashley's point about pooling resources is a good thought. It's important at your institution that you talk with your general counsel to identify which offices have responsibility and what responsibility they have. It will vary by institution and it will vary by the nature of how funding is set up at your school. At the University of Minnesota, disability services has a funding available to provide accommodations for students domestically, and they will assess what kind of accommodations can travel with the student abroad. The student abroad office doesn't assess the disability funding, but has resources for our own programs and determines whether we can provide some funding to modify an existing situation or if we needed special transportation, is that possible. A large part of it comes under what is considered reasonable. It needs to be a reasonable accommodation focusing primarily on the academic program and we'll then consult with our legal counsel as well as disability services to see what's possible.

Keep in mind, also, that there are a lot of creative solutions that don't cost a great deal of money or may be able to come from the overseas location. And so there are disability services programs abroad. Sometimes if the student is directly enrolled at the overseas university they would have access to services that a student native to that country would be able to access. So there are a number of different factors that go into assessing what kind of funding could be possible and whether it is reasonable to make the accommodation that the student needs. In some cases the accommodation is not reasonable to achieve and in that case, students, hopefully, have some additional study abroad programs available to them where the accommodation could be provided.

ASHLEY: This is Ashley again. Heidi reminded me of one other thing. It can be really helpful for study abroad offices, and necessary not just helpful, to really budget for reasonable accommodations by incorporating a line item just as they would budget for staff expenses and emergency related expenses. It would also be recommended that they budget for reasonable accommodations as well. That way should a student, you know, need some kind of accommodation as a financial expense, you're not caught off guard or unprepared and you would have that reassurance that there is funding available. And if no students, as Heidi mentioned, students who have disabilities, many of them don't even need accommodations that require any expense or they might be low cost. And if that's the case, if that reasonable accommodation fund doesn't get used, it could be moved over towards a different line item. So that's one strategy that some institutions use to address that question.

CLAIRE: Great, thank you, both. That's really helpful information. Shawna, are there any other questions?

SHAWNA: Nope, that's all the questions we've gotten so far.

CLAIRE: Okay, well if there are no more questions, I'd like to take the opportunity to say thank you again so much to Ashley and Heidi and Connie. Thank you for being here today and talking about the great ideas and resources that are available to help students with disabilities abroad and Connie, thanks for helping encourage other students to do so. We really appreciate everyone being here and being part of this web symposium. Stay tuned for future Gilman web symposiums. Thank you, everyone. Have a great afternoon.

Gilman Scholarship Program Web Symposium
Study Abroad for Students with Disabilities
The Institute of International Education (IIE)
August 29, 2013

CAPTIONING PROVIDED BY:
ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION SERVICES, LLC