

The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act

Ask: Cosponsor the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act, soon to be reintroduced.

Study abroad is a learning opportunity that enables students to develop critical skills needed to compete in today's global economy, including foreign language fluency, strong problem-solving, and cross-cultural competence. Yet less than 10 percent of U.S. college students study abroad before they graduate. **At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020-21 academic year, U.S. study abroad participation plummeted 91 percent.** Participation numbers have begun to return; according to a Spring 2022 snapshot survey by the Institute of International Education, 65 percent of U.S. higher education institutions reported offering in-person study abroad programming for Fall 2022. However, it is not enough to just get back to pre-pandemic levels. In a post-pandemic world, increasing access to study abroad will be critical to ensuring that U.S. students gain the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to succeed in tackling global challenges and succeeding in a global economy.

The bill seeks to expand access to study abroad for U.S. college students by **enhancing the State Department's Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students (IDEAS) program and formally renaming it as the "Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program"**. Inspired by the vision of the late Senator Paul Simon of Illinois and the recommendations of the congressionally-appointed Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, the legislation would advance four national goals:

- One million U.S. college students will study abroad annually for credit;
- Study abroad participants will more closely represent the demographics of the undergraduate population in terms of gender, ethnicity, students with disabilities, income level, and field of study;
- A significantly greater proportion of study abroad will occur in nontraditional destinations outside Western Europe; and
- Higher education institutions will make study abroad a critical component of a quality higher education.

In the 117th Congress, U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) and U.S. Representatives Cheri Bustos (D-Ill.) and John Katko (R-N.Y.) introduced the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act of 2022 (H.R. 9145/S.5098). Sponsors are working to reintroduce the bill soon.

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