

Internationalizing the campus



Kirkwood Community College students on a study abroad trip in Greece. (Photo: KCC)

BY **ELLIE ASHFORD** OCTOBER 21, 2019 [□□□□□](#)

While the number of community college students taking study abroad experiences has been steadily increasing over the past few years, it's still much lower than that of other types of higher education institutions.

Of the 323,727 U.S. students in higher education who studied abroad in 2015-17, only 7,215 were from community colleges, according to the most recent Open Doors report by the Institute of International Education.

To encourage more students to take advantage of foreign trips, community colleges that put a priority on globalizing their campuses are helping students to apply for these trips and seeking grants, such as State Department-funded [Benjamin A. Gilman scholarships](#), to help pay for them.

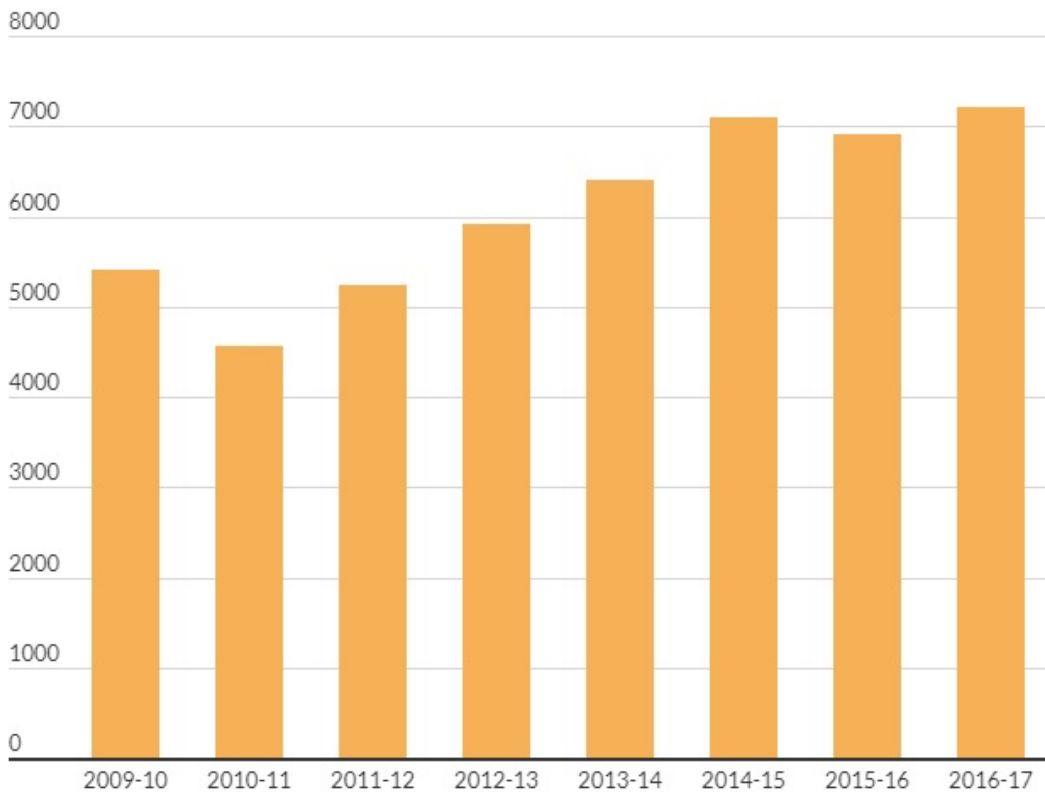
One source of funding for colleges is World Learning's [capacity-building grants](#). The program, funded by the State Department, provides \$35,000 grants to help colleges create, expand and diversify student exchanges. In the most recent funding round, six of the 22 grantees were community colleges. The next funding round opens in December.

Capacity-building is especially important because community college students need extra encouragement to consider applying for study abroad programs.

Contrary to popular opinion, the biggest obstacle is not affordability; it is perception, says project director Amy Fisher Bruey at World Learning. Many community college students have fears about traveling internationally or “have trouble seeing themselves as someone who travels abroad.”

U.S. study abroad trends

7,215 community college students studied abroad for academic credit in 2016-17.



Source: Institute of International Education

Another big challenge for community colleges is getting enough students to sign up to make a program financially viable. That’s why **Davidson County Community College** (DCCC) in North Carolina often works in consortia, says Suzanne LaVenture, director of international education.

DCCC received **capacity-building grants** from World Learning in partnership with Central Piedmont Community College to develop study abroad programs in Guatemala, targeted to nursing students, and in South Africa, for students in healthcare and biology programs.

For the past six years, DCCC also has worked with the [Institute of Study Abroad Ireland](#) to run a popular spring break trip to Ireland.

The Fulbright Program is a central pillar of DCCC's international engagement activity. The college recently sent three campus leaders abroad with the [Fulbright International Administrators Seminar](#) program.

LaVenture notes that of the 400 Fulbright language teachers in the U.S., only four are at community colleges – including two at DCCC.

One of them is from France, and the other, from Ireland, is teaching Gaelic. That course, offered through the continuing education, is popular among community members with roots in Ireland.

DCCC also has hosted Fulbright scholars in residence – from China and Macedonia and one next year from Argentina – who teach other subjects.

“For students whose job or family responsibilities prevent them from traveling, the visiting Fulbright instructors bring the world to them,” LaVenture says.



Students at Davidson County Community College give a presentation on Australia. (Photo: DCCC)

A life-changing experience

DCCC has a strong international culture with the goal to “build awareness that we’re part of a larger picture,” LaVenture says. “We’ve created an environment where our students are more open to study abroad opportunities.”

That culture is important at a semi-rural college like DCCC, where about half of the students receive Pell grants.

For students who study abroad, “it’s a life-changing experience,” LaVenture says. In one example, an early-college student who was depressed and anxious returned from a trip to Ireland “reinvigorated and ready to succeed in school,” she says. The trip “opened her eyes to the possibilities out there in the world.”

Another student who planned to become an orthodontist switched her major to Spanish after a trip to Spain. She now works for an international travel company.

For students who can’t take advantage of foreign travel, DCCC promotes virtual exchanges. One such exchange involves a joint project with business students at a French university. DCCC students carry out an activity that markets French chocolate in the U.S., while their counterparts try to market North Carolina barbecue in France.

A career advantage

DCCC is one of about 20 community colleges in North Carolina that participates in the Global Distinction initiative sponsored by [World View](#), a program based at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Students who graduate from Global Distinction Colleges can earn a “graduated with global distinction” notation on their transcripts if they complete at least 15 credit hours of globally intensive courses, participate in eight international activities, complete 30 hours in a study abroad program or domestic intercultural experience, and complete a capstone presentation.

Over the past six years, more than 400 DCCC students participated in the Global Distinction program and 100 completed all the requirements, LaVenture says.

A study by the [Center for Global Education](#) found that students who have international experiences have higher grades, spend less time in developmental courses and have higher rates of retention, transfer and graduation. Students also gain a broader perspective of world affairs, and they come back more motivated to learn and better prepared for a globalized workplace.

Community colleges benefit, too. Strong international programs can raise the prestige and marketability of community colleges, which can help increase enrollment, says Wayne Wheeler, director of international programs at the [American Association of Community Colleges](#). As a result, there is a strong movement among community colleges to internationalize their campuses, as they recognize the need to prepare students for success in a global economy, he says.

Making trips affordable

Offering meaningful study abroad opportunities is a top priority at [Miami Dade College](#) because of the students it serves, many of whom have never traveled beyond the region. These trips are developed by faculty because “it makes them so much more impactful, and they know study abroad leaves a lasting impression on students,” says Liza Carbajo, executive director of the Office of International Education.

Cost is also important, because so many MDC students are economically disadvantaged and first-generation students. Trips tend to be short, 10 to 23 days, with the cost usually capped at \$3,000, including transportation, lodging and most other expenses.

MDC’s leadership believes study abroad opportunities shouldn’t be limited to students who can afford foreign travel.

As a result, they partner with [Educate Tomorrow](#), an organization that provides services to Miami students who have been homeless or have phased out of foster care and provides scholarships for those students to study abroad. Three of those students joined an MDC trip to Ecuador to study earth literacy and sustainability this summer.

The college also works with organizations such as the [Council on International Exchange](#) and [Diversity Abroad](#) to secure scholarships for student trips and helps students receiving Pell grants apply for a Gilman scholarship.



Miami Dade College students in Paris. (Photo: MDC)

“We do a lot of advising and outreach to help students consider studying abroad, especially when they have limited budgets, jobs and family obligations,” Carbajo says. “That’s why shorter trips work best.”

“We give them talking points to use with employers to help them get the necessary time off and remain in good standing while away,” Carbajo adds. “We also do a lot of mentoring and encouraging to help them see that these trips are essential for them to gain experience and the soft skills employers are looking for.”

MDC faculty have proposed eight trips for next summer, including one to study criminal justice in England. A 12-day trip, conducted annually, focuses on multicultural communications in Indonesia for students studying the social sciences, international relations and political science.

MDC is part of the **College Consortium for International Studies**, an organization that facilitates study abroad and international exchanges. MDC faculty also organize exchanges, but “they really have to be an active exchange,” Carbajo says.

There is growing interest at MDC regarding connecting trips to the needs of industries in the Miami area.

In one example, the National Science Foundation awarded a grant to the dean of engineering, technology and design to bring four students and three faculty to Israel for a conference on cybersecurity, which is a big industry in Israel and a growing employment sector in Miami.

When students come back, some even want to change majors. For example, MDC has a student who switched to international affairs after a trip to Indonesia and secured a spot in a fellowship program in Washington, D.C.

Global learning

In addition to promoting trips abroad, MDC has focused on bringing more global learning into the classroom, inviting international delegations to MDC and hosting international conferences.

MDC also hosts “Diplomats in Residence” arranged through the State Department. They spend time on campus and talk to students about career possibilities in foreign affairs, give presentations in class, and participate in international events at the college.

For [Kirkwood Community College](#) in Iowa, international exchanges are a key part of the college's goal to give students global learning experiences, says Dawn Wood, dean of international programs.

[NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#) will present Kirkwood with a [Senator Paul Simon Award for Campus Internationalization](#) in November in recognition of the college's overall excellence in promoting a global perspective in its mission and programs. The college facilitated exchanges with hundreds of students, faculty and staff as part of the [Global Education Network](#) that also includes Box Hill Institute in Melbourne, Australia; Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in Calgary, Canada; and the Institute of Technical Education in Singapore.

There are also study abroad experiences that focus on students in automotive and industrial technology. Students in technology and applied sciences are actually more likely to study abroad than students in the humanities, Wood says.

Seeing the value

All students who go abroad should be able to compare and contrast their home culture with that of their host country, gain intercultural skills they can use in the future, and be able to apply their experience to a future career or educational objective.

"We always make sure our programs have specific learning outcomes," Wood says.

Students receive academic credit for participating and are usually required to give a presentation at the end of the trip. "It's important to hear the students' stories," she says.

Kirkwood also offers global exchanges through virtual classroom activities and welcomes foreign exchange students.

Out of a total enrollment of 16,000, 160 Kirkwood students participated in a study abroad program last year. When Wood started teaching global business skills 11 years ago, about 5 percent of her students said they had lived or traveled to another country; now it's about 20 percent.

"We realize globalization is a fact; the world is getting smaller every day," Wood says, and the interpersonal skills gained from these trips can help in the workplace.

