Study Abroad for Engineering Students: Frequently Asked Questions

Can I study abroad as an engineering student? Yes, you can!

But doesn’t the School of Engineering and Applied Science discourage studying abroad? No, we certainly don’t. The challenges in engineering, science, technology, infrastructure, commerce, and finance that Princeton engineering graduates will solve are all global in scope, and our students need to be prepared to cross boundaries comfortably to work in different cultures.

But my friends say I’ll miss a lot while I’m away. Princeton has been around since 1746 and will still be here when you get back. Many of your friends will probably come to visit you when you’re abroad and wish they took the opportunity themselves. With e-mail and Facebook you certainly won’t be out of touch, and if you keep a blog while you’re away, your friends will know what you’re doing all the time.

Where have Princeton engineering students studied abroad? They have gone to many different countries, including England, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Korea, China, Argentina, Chile, and Ghana.

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Do Princeton engineering students study abroad for a semester or a year? In most cases, they spend a semester abroad, but in some instances, a full year makes more sense. For example, students who participate in the Princeton-Oxford Engineering Exchange spend a full academic year abroad due to the structure of the Oxford program of instruction.

When is the best time to study abroad? It depends on the structure of the program of study in your department at Princeton. In many cases, the spring term of junior year works best, but in some departments there is a course which it is difficult to replace with a course taken elsewhere, so students in those departments may study abroad in the fall of junior year. Spring of sophomore year may also be possible, depending on your departmental requirements.

How do I decide where to study? Where would you like to go? Is there a country or continent that has always intrigued you? Perhaps you have cultural or ethnic roots in a country or region and would like to experience life there? Do you want a real Gothic Experience? Can you think of other questions to ask yourself? If you’re still unsure, the advisers at the Office of International Programs can help.

Isn’t it difficult to find engineering courses abroad that match to Princeton courses? With a little work, it is usually possible to find courses that are comparable in content and rigor to those at Princeton. Most of the foreign institutions where Princeton students study also have distinguished traditions of engineering education.

What about the language barrier? Can I really study abroad in a language other than English? It depends on how well you know that language. The minimum Princeton threshold for studying abroad in a different language is having mastered it at the equivalent of 107/108 courses, but for working in
technical subjects you should be more proficient than that. Luckily, there are many countries where English is the standard language of instruction. In Scandinavian countries, for example, many courses are offered in English, while the language spoken outside the classroom is not (but most people can speak English very well nonetheless.)

**How do I start planning to study abroad?** Once you are reasonably confident about your choice of major in the second term of freshman year, you can start planning in earnest. Think about where you might want to go. Then schedule a short meeting with Dean Bogucki for an initial conversation, followed by a meeting with an adviser in the Office of International Programs to discuss particular schools and programs. Once you have done your research on the schools and their programs of instruction and met with Dean Bogucki and an adviser in the Office of International Program, you should fillout the Princeton Study Abroad Approval Form and take it and the information about your proposed courses to your departmental representative.

**What if the engineering courses offered by the foreign school don’t match Princeton courses exactly?** Sometimes other schools divide subjects differently from Princeton, and it might be necessary to use more than one course abroad to fulfill a single Princeton requirement. You will discuss these matters with your departmental representative.

**Can I take an engineering course abroad that does not have a matching course at Princeton?** In many cases, yes. Usually it can be counted as a technical elective. For example, a foreign school may have a course in biomedical engineering which we simply do not offer here.

**Can I receive humanities and social science distribution credit for non-engineering courses taken abroad?** In many cases, yes. You’ll need to obtain the approval from the appropriate departmental representative at Princeton.

**Can I also fulfill requirements for certificate programs abroad?** That depends on the certificate program and the program of study at the foreign university. In many cases, the answer is yes, but it is true that it may be difficult. In the end, the only document that really counts is your transcript, and even if you miss qualifying for a certificate program by a course or two, your other courses in that area will certainly be documented on your transcript. It will be clear to anyone reading your transcript that you have done significant work in that area, even if you don’t get the certificate.

**What about ABET accreditation?** Students in ABET-accredited programs have not had a problem studying abroad. One of the core criteria for ABET accreditation (known collectively as “A-K”) is Criterion H: “(engineering programs must demonstrate that their students attain) the broad education necessary to understand the impact of engineering solutions in a global, economic, environmental, and societal context.” Studying abroad is certainly consistent with this criterion. Moreover, ABET and its corresponding organizations in Australia, Canada, Ireland, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom are signatories of the Washington Accord, which recognizes the substantial equivalency of programs accredited by these organizations. See [http://www.washingtonaccord.org/](http://www.washingtonaccord.org/) for more information. Even if the country where you are studying is not a signatory of the Washington Accord, there has never been an issue with courses that are evaluated and approved by Princeton as substantially equivalent to our own courses being accepted by ABET.

*Please go away!*