



Section 7 - Biggest Challenge of Being a Resident Director in Europe

Survey respondents were asked an open-ended text response question ‘**What do you see as the biggest challenge of being a Resident Director in Europe**’. The responses (n=133) were coded into general categories and summarized in terms of number and frequency of mention (Table 7.1). Selected individual text responses are also presented below.

Table 7.1. The biggest challenge of being a Resident Director in Europe. Original answers were in open-ended text format and were categorized for clarity with number of respondents and percent respondents who made a comment within that category. Text responses often included statements in more than one category.

Categorized Responses	# Respondents	% Respondents
The multiple responsibilities, work-life balance, and stress of 24/7 role	35	26.3
Communication, support and disconnect challenges with home institution	31	23.3
Navigating US - Europe cultural differences	24	18.0
Managing home office expectations	20	15.0
Managing student expectations	19	14.3
Student safety, emergency response, and mental health	18	13.5
Disconnect between US/EU laws and policies	17	12.8
European law challenges (HR, GDPR, immigration etc.)	13	9.8
Managing staff, faculty, and operations	11	8.3
Lack of program resources (infrastructure and funding)	9	6.8
Lack of academic respect/trust for program or RD from home institution	9	6.8
Study Abroad as a business and customer service model	9	6.8
Student immersion challenges	6	4.5
US centric view of study abroad	5	3.8
Lack of student preparation (esp. language)	5	3.8
Challenges with short term programs	5	3.8
Recruitment and maintaining steady enrollment	4	3.0
Lack of career progression opportunities	4	3.0

Low salaries/high cost of living	3	2.3
Host country partner institution challenges	2	1.5

Sample Responses to the Open-Ended Question: **‘What do you see as the biggest challenge of being a Resident Director in Europe’**. Several statements have been edited to remove identifying information.

- *The biggest challenge is immerse students to a local community and try to encourage them not to travel every weekend*
- *You are responsible for many facets of the student's study abroad experience from the operational to the creative side of thinking of new ways to provide a more comprehensive/immersive experience for them. An RD is expected to both be able to manage an emergency situation one day and to be culturally-engaging and knowledgeable the next day while in the background, unseen from most people, managing the operational-running of the program such as preparing finances, budgets, HR, etc.*
- *In [country name] with the very strict and complex labor law code, it is hard to staff for the job we have to do (odd hours, on call duty, weekend work) It is like fitting a square into a circle. HR concerns and issues are my biggest issue.*
- *Not being considered and listened to a lot because I am not American.*
- *If we are referring to US institutions operating in Europe, we are at a crucial cross-roads. The lack of focus on foreign language learning at secondary levels of US education is a threat to our existence as an 'local immersion' program. Students cannot be adequately prepared to do post-secondary learning during their sojourn if they have not begun serious target language study before entering University. This contributes to a situation where US students can now benefit from the greater offering of English medium coursework in local Universities; thereby side-stepping the immersive language aspect. This is a disservice to US students who could ultimately benefit from de-centering their place in the world through foreign language acquisition beyond a simple level of exchange of service locally.*
- *My biggest challenge is maintaining a steady enrollment in my program at a time when fewer US students are attracted by my type of program which requires a certain fluency in [language] and a home stay. It's very frustrating because there is only so much I can do. I wish my home institution would make better use of me to recruit students. At the same time, I appreciate that my home institution is not concentrating on short term programs to boost our enrollment but I do worry about our long term viability.*

- *In my opinion, the biggest challenge consists of building a bridge between SA business and quality education. I regularly feel that we must compromise our professional opinion as educators to fit the commercial and marketing framework the SA has become for the US universities. The second quite as big a challenge is to find a way to adapt to the familiar American academic and cultural habits of our students while at the same time trying to remain faithful and introductive to our local culture and customs.*
- *Though we have sufficient resources for doing our job, we do not have the resources of a US campus and students and colleagues in the US sometimes do not understand this.*
- *Being removed from the home institution, and only knowing students for a brief phase of their college careers.*
- *Students from abroad have many possibilities to study in Europe and especially in [country name]. Many universities are happy to host study abroad students for a whole study or a semester abroad. This means that our university needs to strengthen our USPs and come up with new strategies on how to attract more incoming students.*
- *Straddling the gap between the U.S. (unacknowledged) expectations and assumptions and European culture and legalities.*
- *The distance from decision makers at home, the 'out of sight, out of mind' syndrome that can affect the program, the inability to be my own best advocate at the institution as I am not present in the US. On a day to day basis, my management in the US has no idea what happens on our program....as long as things go well. Sometimes it is hard to get messages across, such as the benefits we see on the ground for students, and the massive changes they undergo while abroad. They also don't see the day to day stresses that RDs and staff deal with. There is a perception that this is a cushy job, living in a desirable location. Yes, it's nice, but it is a lot of hard work and massive amounts of responsibility. I also do not believe that in general Resident Directors and on-site staff get credit within the study abroad world for all that they do. They make it happen on the ground. You can schmooze at NAFSA all you like, but a program is only as good as the resources (staff, facilities, residence, location etc.) on the ground. I think the study abroad world has forgotten that. Our distance from the main campus and decision makers has hurt us as a crucial part of the sector.*
- *The biggest challenge is the disconnect between myself and the home institution. Clear communication is a major problem, and roles and job expectations are not defined properly because there is not a real understanding of the campus set up in-country.*
- *I don't think my institutional leaders really know the challenges of operating on the ground. They make promises that we cannot always keep, and we on the ground*

look bad, or are pressured to deliver what they promised. It has become too much of a business and not so much an academic pursuit anymore. Faculty led programs are a nightmare to host compared to semester programs, and are often superficial academic tourism, not in depth exploration or immersion. But that's where the field is heading unfortunately.

- *Managing an increasingly dependent type of American student who comes with a whole set of emotional and psychological baggage but who also expects a very high level of service.*
- *Dealing with US HQ. They cannot reconcile their strong need to know what is going on and/or to try to control things with their almost total inability or unwillingness to take the time to understand the major differences, not just of operating a small branch campus, but of doing so in a country that is not particularly easy to navigate. I don't blame them, it is a naturally occurring predicament, part of the job.*
- *Main campus' point of view is "US-centric". The biggest challenge is to make them understand that things need to work differently in another country.*
- *In a sense, no matter how experienced one is, how many years one has been teaching, how many publications one has, you are still considered a B-series employee, and as a faculty member you are not recognized for your value. Students, administrators and staff in the U.S. think that you are having fun abroad and that you are there to assure customer service satisfaction.*
- *In the beginning, it is hard to explain how many hats you wear and how time-consuming the fight with local inefficiency and bureaucracy can be. First, I didn't feel valued in the efforts I made on a daily base for the program (the home campus did not know and did not understand how much energy I invested) and worse, the visiting US faculty treated me not as an equal member of the University (despite my higher degrees in education), made me feel like a second class instructor and pretended me to "serve" them in their needs while abroad like a staff member.*
- *Being able to afford a decent life and decent housing with the high cost of living in [city name] and low salaries paid to study abroad professionals, including the taxes the [country name] government takes out of my paycheck.*
- *Incompatibility of agendas between our customers and our vendors.*
- *Striking a balance between US and EC laws.*
- *Keeping Europe relevant.*
- *The biggest challenge is making the US institution understand local laws.*

- *Things are quite different in Europe: from the lifestyle, to the use of language, history, academic culture.... The biggest challenge comes with faculty-led programs, in many cases US faculty show lack of knowledge and can easily misinterpret our way of doing things, they are not open to learning about the new surroundings or environment and in general, they think they know more than anyone else. I find it easy to adjust to their needs and plan successful programs, but I think they are missing a lot by not being receptive.*
- *There are many cultural differences with the US that we need to understand but that sometimes is not understood from our main offices in the US. We have to adjust to the US way of things but I have seen in many conferences that they never address the issue from the other side, from the European side. Everything is US centered.*
- *The lack of understanding from the home institution about my skills and expertise; the feeling that when I am on the home campus other administrators see me as a "contractor", not a member of the university. The feeling of no one understanding the overwhelming responsibility and the diverse skill set required to do this job well, from making sure we have light bulbs, to triaging mentally ill students to curriculum development to meeting with the Vice-Rector of the [country name] university and high ranking officials at the US Embassy. I believe the title itself, "RD", contributes to this misperception, as it sounds like we are dorm monitors, not highly skilled and educated professionals with an impressive multifaceted skill set and deep knowledge about how to run our programs in our countries.*
- *Burn out! The expectation to be all things to all people can be challenging at times, especially when combined with family life.*
- *Feeling connected with our American university as a whole. Our Study Abroad team is fantastic to work with in the US, but it sometimes feels like we are not fully connected to the overall university.*
- *Gaining the respect of my faculty colleagues back in the US for the academic experience we offer abroad.*
- *There are limited opportunities for institutional or personal growth.*