



August 2, 2021

Dear Mr. Castro,

I hope you are well.

Since we last communicated in April, a letter has been sent to EU Commissioner, Mariya Gabriel, about further concerns that we had in relation to US study abroad students. We received a kind response in which Ms. Gabriel suggested that we draw up a list of items that have challenged us in the last few years and share them with you. It would be greatly appreciated if these could be brought to the attention of any EU offices or working groups that are involved in these matters.

The following list is organized in order of urgency, especially due to the pandemic and in anticipation of a slow but hopefully steady return to normal. While some of these issues might surpass the purview of the EU Commission, a lot of them are interconnected and therefore we think it helpful to list them all together, thus providing an overarching thread that can be used for future conversations.

The points we bring up apply to US students – numbering just over 190,000 before the pandemic – but many of them also concern US faculty members as they accompany students and / or fulfil academic and administrative roles in our programs.

- **Green Pass for US students (and other 3rd countries):** the vast majority of our students will be vaccinated before coming to Europe next month. Many countries are trying to figure out how to offer the EU Green Pass to them but it is proving to be a technical challenge. We hope that the EU Commission will assist in easing the process and giving guidance to all EU countries.
- **Travel and health warnings:** we ask that the EU Commission continue to work closely with US authorities on travel warnings, keeping circulation open wherever and whenever possible. After suffering a year of almost total cessation of US study abroad activity, we need your help in order to move forward; another year without opening our study centers will lead to permanent program closures and, as a result, a loss of jobs and all the related economic benefits that we outlined in our first letter. We understand that US and EU officials rightfully act to protect the interests of their own citizens, so we are only suggesting more extensive cooperation in these matters.

- **Schengen rules and possible impact on US students:** we understand that the EU Commission will be reviewing the rules on Schengen and circulation of peoples within the EU Zone. We ask the Commission to take into account the needs of citizens from 3rd countries, in particular the US, when it comes to study and travel in the EU. In the future, could we imagine one unique and common document valid for the entire EU, similar to what the EU just accomplished through the Green Pass? We are of course well aware of the existing rules on the multi-entry D visa; however, what we have all experienced over the years, working on the ground with students, is that then each Member State (i.e., each single Consulate) follows and imposes different practices, often requiring a variety of different documents, etc. Therefore, in this area, a truly common and harmonized procedure seems essential.
- **EU-wide immigration guidance:** we hope that the EU Commission will play a role in supporting US study abroad by proposing European-wide immigration rules. It would be helpful to have a future body of reference for U.S. students coming to study in any EU country. For example, a Memorandum of Understanding would serve to establish a balanced approach and thus facilitate US / EU exchanges, as well as a strong recommendation to the Member States.
- **EU-wide visas:** related to the previous item, we have US students now participating in shorter study programs in multiple countries. For example, if a student does an 8-week program in Paris, 8 weeks in Rome and finishes the European stay with 8 weeks in Madrid, there has been no clear solution in terms of obtaining one's visa, since often the Consulate of the country of first arrival has created obstacles to the processing of the visa application. Would it be possible therefore to create a real single visa for study in multiple countries, with the undisputable and binding indication that it is only the Consulate of the country of first arrival that has the legal obligation to process such a visa application?
- **Inclusion of U.S. study abroad students in the larger category of study abroad (i.e. Erasmus) in Europe:** in discussions we've had with national authorities in our member countries, we've discovered that US study abroad students often don't figure in any of the significant discussions about international education. We think that some EU universities perceive our programs as competition but we would like to argue that they in fact are very complimentary. First, it should be pointed out that many US students would not go on a study abroad program if not for the extraordinary support (logistical, housing, academic support, guidance with cultural immersion, etc.) that our programs provide. Next, many students will come back post-degree to study and / or do internships in Europe, establishing durable ties with EU institutions and businesses. Finally, we've noted recently that a number of our students who came on a traditional US study abroad program as undergraduates, enroll directly in EU institutions for graduate studies.
- **National Healthcare access to U.S. students:** many EU countries have existing systems in place that make it difficult for US students to obtain easy access to affordable healthcare. Could the EU work with US authorities to establish some kind of bilateral accord, beneficial to all? It's an issue that prohibits EU students from going to study in the US as well as American students coming to Europe. It would thus be helpful if the citizens of 3rd countries get the same treatment as EU citizens in terms of healthcare.

- **EU-wide resources for U.S. study abroad students:** we believe this is something that many EU institutions and even governments are looking into, but it would be helpful to develop and promote different tools / resources that would support US study abroad. English language information sources, virtual events such as EU and/or country-by-country presentations of the available education opportunities for US students, to name but a few examples.

To conclude, we are aware of the complexity of the items listed above and can only imagine that some of the legal framework must be dealt with at the highest echelons of power between nations. However, we know that the EU Commission has many work groups that deal with certain aspects of the above items. We would therefore welcome the opportunity to participate in the groups or at least have our concerns brought to their attention. We would like to see policies developed that are mutually beneficial to all and that show the strong cooperation and collaborative spirit of the EU in tackling any hurdles that might impede the internationalization of EU higher education and the participation of US students and faculty in this context.

Moving forward, we believe that the lessons we learned during the pandemic can help us in addressing the challenges of study abroad in the 21st Century. Hard work, collaborative efforts, bilateral agreements, good faith, and the utmost transparency seems essential in the process. Given what we've seen in the last 18 months, we're convinced that EU - US cooperation is essential in fulfilling the mission of international education, so dear the founding principles of the European Union.

We remain open to your kind consideration of this letter and eagerly await your response. We would be very happy to organize a conversation with you, either in person or online.

Sincerely,



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