



THE FORUM
ON EDUCATION ABROAD

E X P A N D I N G

Education Abroad Access for Nontraditional Learners

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Executive Summary

Nontraditional: not following or conforming to tradition: not adhering to past practices or conventions: not traditional¹

Try to define “nontraditional learner.” Go ahead... we’ll wait! If you’re still defining the term by the time you finish reading this paper, then you’re likely on the right track.

When we set out to write this paper, our first task was to define the term “nontraditional” student. In thinking collaboratively as a group of professionals with experiences as diverse as the students we work with, we realized that even the term “student” had the potential to exclude, and so we settled on “learner” to guide our conversations, research, and resources to be as inclusive as possible.

Drafting this paper started with us acknowledging that the silos we work in are the very products of traditional settings, which were never intended to optimize the experience for nontraditional learners. Nontraditional learners, and those working in professional capacities to support them, face barriers ranging from the tangible (lack of funding, which leads to a lack of resources and a lack of capacity) to the more abstract and philosophical (institutional decision-makers not understanding the potential and positive impact of education abroad for nontraditional learners).

What’s important about this paper is that it’s been written in a world shaped by a global pandemic. And the impacts of the pandemic on education abroad, on higher education, and on learning in general are not in the proverbial rearview mirror. In fact, they may never be. The concepts of education and learning have, in every sense, been transformed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Often, research and literature focuses on nontraditional learners, whereas global education tends to focus on the overarching benefits of education abroad. In other instances, what begins as work advocating for nontraditional learners to have access to global education defines “nontraditional” too narrowly.

In this paper, we seek to demonstrate the importance of *all* learners having access to education abroad opportunities, and we highlight the need for resources to make education abroad accessible to and inclusive of all. We are doing so with the diverse experiences that both learners *and* educators had during the COVID-19 pandemic, when learning was only able to take place in ways considered nontraditional.

This paper incorporates survey results, research, literature, and critical analysis. We consider education abroad resources for nontraditional learners through lenses of barriers such as capacity and lingering institutional assumptions, as well as strategies that have engaged

¹ Nontraditional. (2023, May 14). In *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nontraditional>



nontraditional learners, like innovative program development, campus collaborations, and targeted marketing and outreach.

We center the perspectives of education abroad professionals who work with a diverse range of nontraditional learners, and share resources to support nontraditional learners. While it may be impossible to consider any resource list complete, our hope is that it provides a foundational pathway for global education professionals to become stronger advocates for nontraditional learners. Our goals for this paper are twofold: to equip those working in education abroad to be stronger advocates for all learners, and to catalyze research regarding the support and retention of nontraditional learners in education abroad spaces.

Introduction

As education abroad professionals, we see firsthand the inequities in our society reflected in the students who access education abroad programs and those who miss out on vital global learning experiences. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, intercultural fluency is one of the key skills that employers are looking for in job candidates.² However, a recent study by the Association of American Colleges & Universities found that, while 54% of employers believe that intercultural fluency is essential for workplace success, only 43% of employers feel that recent college graduates possess this skill. Additionally, 44% of employers indicated that they are much more likely to hire a graduate who has participated in a "global learning experience that included exposure to diverse experiences and perspectives."³

While these research results support the value of global learning experiences most often found within education abroad programming, nontraditional students often face significant challenges in accessing these opportunities due to cost and time constraints related to personal and professional obligations. Advocates of education abroad programming know the benefits of these programs and should be actively engaged in ensuring our programming is accessible to all.

The National Center for Education Statistics defines "nontraditional student" as one over the age of 24 and part of a "large, heterogeneous population of adult students who often have family and work responsibilities as well as other life circumstances that can interfere with successful completion of educational objectives."⁴ In 2021, 34% of students enrolled in higher education in the United States met this definition of "nontraditional."⁵ Bearing in mind this age-based

² National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2021). *Competencies for a career-ready workforce*.

<https://www.naceweb.org/uploadedfiles/files/2021/resources/nace-career-readiness-competencies-revised-apr-2021.pdf>

³ Finley, A. (2021). *How colleges contribute to workforce success*. Association of American Colleges and Universities.

<https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/research/AACUEmployerReport2021.pdf>

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). *Nontraditional undergraduates: Definitions and data*.

<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs/web/97578e.asp>

⁵ National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). *Number of students, by age category, enrolled in postsecondary institutions*.

<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/TrendGenerator/app/answer/2/8>



definition, in 2019-20, 69.7% of students participating in education abroad were traditional-aged college juniors and seniors and the majority (68%) identified as white.⁶

How do education abroad professionals push the boundaries of our own work to be more inclusive and reach underrepresented populations? This was the task of The Forum on Education Abroad's 2022-23 working group *Expanding Education Abroad Access to Nontraditional Learners*. To this end, we surveyed our colleagues to better understand the barriers faced and the resources and strategies that are currently being implemented. In this paper, we share the results of our survey, highlight the work of our colleagues, and make known current practices that can be replicated in other institutions and programs. Finally, we identify gaps in resources and tools and include a call to action to increase outreach and access to nontraditional education abroad students.

Background

As we welcome (or welcome back) our nontraditional learners, we must consider – with the aim of making education more equitable, accessible, and inclusive – how to extend to *all* students the opportunities that exist for “traditional” students, including education abroad. This paper investigates what resources and tools the field needs to expand access and communicate its value to potential nontraditional education abroad learners. Based on our working group's charge, we define “nontraditional education abroad learners” as adult learners who may be veterans, pursuing noncredit continuing education, graduate school, or those enrolled primarily remote or online. We recognize the breadth of learners that this charge includes, and given this, seek to identify preliminary tools that we may use as practitioners, along with stakeholders that we may engage in continuing the work that this charge involves. Some of these stakeholders could include professionals in career services; veterans' affairs; diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice; community college advisors; transfer student support; academic advising; and workforce development.

Benefits of Education Abroad

Over the course of its practice, education abroad has been connected through empirical research to positive academic outcomes such as:

- positive association with liberal education outcomes—intercultural effectiveness and socially responsible leadership⁷;
- language learning gains⁸;

⁶ IIE Open Doors. (2022). *Profile of U.S. study abroad students*. <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/us-study-abroad/student-profile/>

⁷ Kilgo, C.A., Ezell Sheets, J.K. & Pascarella, E.T. The link between high-impact practices and student learning: some longitudinal evidence. *High Educ* 69, 509–525 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-014-9788-z>

⁸ Varela, O. E. (2017). Learning outcomes of study-abroad programs: A meta-analysis. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 16(4), 531-561. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2015.0250>



- improved grades and degree levels⁹; and
- positive impact on grade point average (GPA) and higher rates of degree completion with minimal, if any, additional time to completion.¹⁰

Education abroad has also been linked to career skill development¹¹ and cultural competence¹². A 2018 Harvard Business Review project conducted by five researchers found, in a controlled study, that people who have lived abroad had stronger “self concept clarity” than people who had not lived abroad.¹³ Positive outcomes such as those outlined here – among other catalysts – have influenced U.S. higher education institutions to encourage education abroad participation. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute for International Education (IIE) recorded the highest level of U.S. education abroad participation for academic credit: more than 300,000 U.S. students studied abroad in 2018-2019.¹⁴

It is therefore imperative that nontraditional learners be provided the same opportunities as students following a more “traditional” college path immediately following graduation from secondary education. Training for education abroad professionals to serve this unique population is also necessary to ensure additional tailored support is available to encourage positive outcomes from an education abroad experience.

The objective of this white paper is not to focus on the overarching benefits of education abroad. Rather, we seek to demonstrate the importance of all learners having access to education abroad opportunities, and to highlight the need for resources to make education abroad accessible and inclusive.

Current barriers

Nontraditional students face barriers of many types when it comes to education abroad, and most education abroad practitioners would confirm that these barriers exist. Most extant literature enumerates the barriers to education abroad facing nontraditional students. This paper employs an inclusive definition of “nontraditional”; thus, this working group sought to understand barriers faced by nontraditional learners through surveying the practitioners that may or may not be working with them.

As we will explore in this paper, common themes that emerged as barriers included:

⁹ Cardwell, P. J. (2020). Does studying abroad help academic achievement?. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 10(2), 147-163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2019.1573695>

¹⁰ Bhatt, R., Bell, A., Rubin, D.L., Shiflet, C., & Hodges, L. (2022). Education abroad and college completion. *Research in Higher Education*, 63, 987–1014. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-022-09673-z>

¹¹ Farrugia, C., & Sanger, J. (2017). Gaining an employment edge: The impact of study abroad on 21st century skills & career prospects in the United States. *Washington, DC: IIE Center for Academic Mobility Research and Impact*. <https://www.iie.org/publications/gaining-an-employment-edge-the-impact-of-study-abroad/>

¹² Varela, O. E. (2017). Learning outcomes of study-abroad programs: A meta-analysis. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 16(4), 531-561. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2015.0250>

¹³ Adam, A., Obodaru, O., Lu, J.G., Maddux, W., & Galinsky, A.G. (2018, May 22). How living abroad helps you develop a clearer sense of self. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2018/05/how-living-abroad-helps-you-develop-a-clearer-sense-of-self>

¹⁴ IIE Open Doors. (2020). *2020 Fast facts*. <https://opendoorsdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Open-Doors-2020-Fast-Facts.pdf>



- institutional capacity and capability to work with nontraditional learners;
- uncertainty that institutions fully understand the impact of global education—and potential positive outcomes—for nontraditional learners;
- lack of resources to engage even traditional learners in education abroad adequately, or attempting to engage nontraditional learners in same ways as traditional students;
- understanding veteran benefits; and
- funding (for both nontraditional learners as well as the practitioners who felt their offices were under-resourced and underfunded).

When it comes to barriers, 37.5% of survey respondents said their institutions or organizations were not exploring ways to include nontraditional learners in education abroad. While the term “nontraditional” is broad, and there are vast needs based on each group’s specific identity and needs, it is extremely important to note more than a third of respondents indicated their institutions were not even attempting engagement with nontraditional learners in terms of education abroad. This is especially concerning given that almost 40% of U.S. higher education students are over the age of 24.¹⁵ As we will further elaborate, our survey results reflect the vast range of challenges in this area and indicate a strong desire to develop more robust resources in order to support all students more equitably.

Survey Results

Our working group produced a survey seeking to identify barriers to entry and gaps in resources and tools with regard to supporting nontraditional learners. The survey received 40 responses. Out of these respondents, 37.5% (15 respondents) said their institutions were not exploring ways to include nontraditional learners in education abroad. Several themes emerged from the details provided by respondents, including a lack of capacity and resources, a sense of “catching up” from the setbacks incurred by the pandemic, and education abroad being generally perceived as a low-priority initiative at their institution. In addition, some respondents indicated that they approach support of nontraditional learners in the same way that they treat traditional learners. Still others reported an awareness of existing initiatives to support specific groups of learners, such as the Black Butterfly Initiative, but have not had the ability to explore them further. This range of emergent themes and challenges suggests that serving nontraditional students in education abroad is complex, and that a variety of resources and tools are necessary in order to address the many facets of this work.

¹⁵ National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). *Number of students, by age category, enrolled in postsecondary institutions*. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/TrendGenerator/app/answer/2/8>



Strategies

The majority of respondents reported that their organization was exploring ways to engage nontraditional learners in education abroad experiences. Respondents employed different ways to engage nontraditional learners. In reviewing the answers to open-ended questions, three strategies emerged:

- collaboration with relevant campus offices,
- marketing and advising/support resources targeted to the relevant population, and
- programs developed to meet the needs of nontraditional learners.

The respondents shared work in different stages of development. In some cases, the work was ongoing; and in other cases, the work was in the planning stages, and finally in some it was aspirational.

Campus Collaborations

Respondents to the survey reported that alliances, partnerships, and collaborations with different offices and organizations can support engagement of nontraditional learners in education abroad experiences. Given that education abroad offices may not be in direct contact with these students, connecting with the offices that directly serve these populations can help identify who these students are, their specific needs and obstacles toward participating in education abroad, as well as helping them understand the benefits of such experiences. Some of the collaborations or partnerships mentioned were:

- *Financial aid office* - to better understand opportunities for low-income, veteran and other nontraditional learners that can help them finance education abroad experiences.
- *Employment/career advancement* - to link education abroad with career development and its benefits toward future employment.
- *Other campus collaborations* - such as affinity centers, new student programs, cultural centers, offices of minority student affairs, and college liaisons.
- *Off campus collaborations* - such as one suggested by this respondent: *"We launched the Global Access Initiative in collaboration with UNESCO, to provide access to prospective students in emerging markets."*

Targeted Education Abroad Marketing, Advising, and Support

Another essential strategy expressed by survey respondents is the importance of support. This includes targeted information specific to how nontraditional learners can participate in education abroad, as well as general data and testimonials on outcomes to help potential participants understand the benefits. Furthermore, support may include addressing the needs of a nontraditional population to increase their chances and readiness toward education abroad. Support is suggested by respondents in the following ways:



- *Outreach* - by providing information to nontraditional learners about the process and benefits of education abroad. Several respondents feel like these populations are not targeted and therefore may get the sense that education abroad is just “not for them” or are not even aware of the opportunities.
- *Expanding access* - by bridging gaps and obstacles for students who might find education abroad out of reach, such as students with little to no travel experience, mental health issues, physical and learning obstacles, etc.
- *Advising* - which entails guiding students every step of the way to understand how to participate and how doing so can have long term benefits in several areas of their lives.
- *Research, outcomes, and stories* - one of the two most important strategies that respondents suggest. Their perspective is that there is not enough data available on outcomes of education abroad, especially on its benefit to their future careers or the desire for employers to hire professionals with intercultural competences. One respondent said about this: “*It would be great if professional organizations like The Forum would create publicly available tools that we could share with students.*”

Program Development

In this section, respondents expressed how universities can make adjustments to their programs and systems to incorporate more nontraditional learners to their international education programs. These are some of the specific suggestions:

- *Scholarships* - in addition to research and outcomes, this is the other most frequent strategy suggested by respondents. Funding appears to be a major obstacle for nontraditional learners and thus accessing scholarship opportunities, specific to the type of nontraditional learner (veteran, first generation, etc.), is crucial to increase their participation in education abroad.
- *Virtual* - developing more virtual options that still provide similar benefits but at much lower cost.
- *Programming* - develop programming with nontraditional learners in mind. This may include shorter programming, additional support, accommodations and design focused on the specific needs of a population, etc.

Barriers

Capacity

Capacity was a prominent theme among responses to survey questions about current efforts and resources/tools necessary to communicate the value of education abroad to nontraditional learners and to expand education abroad access to nontraditional learners. Respondents acknowledged issues of capacity within education abroad offices. In response to how the



organization was currently exploring ways to engage nontraditional learners, one respondent shared, “[We] lack the resources to engage even traditional learners adequately.” Another said, “We are trying to catch up from the fallout of the pandemic. We don’t have the staffing to explore at the moment.”

When asked “Are there any resources you currently use to support nontraditional learners?” 12 of the 40 respondents indicated few or no specific resources in support of nontraditional learners. Instead of targeted resources, they rely on the resources for the traditional student body. As one respondent stated, “nothing beyond our ‘traditional’ materials, alas.”

When asked to share their thoughts on needed resources to expand education abroad, capacity was again a common theme. Constraints included time, staffing, funding, access to information (including identification of who the nontraditional learners are on campus), and technology solutions to communicate with nontraditional learners once they are identified. One respondent linked the ongoing capacity issues with the challenges of coming out of the pandemic:

“ We need time to collaborate with non-trad[itional] program faculty directors to truly survey the needs and barriers and consider how to design programs that are desirable and accessible. Right now we are short staffed and dealing with the pandemic disruption at various levels that it still feels out of reach but important to move in this direction.

The pandemic challenges are not strictly in the education abroad offices; another respondent shared that staff turnover in other key collaborating offices impacts their ability to support nontraditional learners.

“ ...we have a long-standing relationship working with our Financial Aid office to build relationships and knowledge of education abroad in hopes of good financial aid advising for low-income students. However, we lost that staff member and are now working to educate new staff.

Capacity issues at the campus level also reverberate throughout the education abroad ecosystem. As one colleague who works at a provider wrote:

“ ...we can only do so much without the support of the university partner. Often times, we aren’t involved in the recruitment process and I feel like that limits our ability to communicate with nontraditional learners about the benefits and possibilities available to them.



Recovering from pandemic losses in funding and staff is a significant and ongoing concern in education abroad and across higher education. In the *2021 State of the Field Update*, The Forum on Education Abroad reported that 57% percent of offices reported additional budget cuts since 2020 and 23% reported lending out their staff to other staff or other divisions.¹⁶ Higher education is challenged by labor shortages, understaffing, the lack of a clear career ladder, and, of course, pay.^{17,18} These concerns predate the pandemic but were certainly exacerbated by the additional work staff assumed, often as frontline workers. In the 2022 State of the Field Survey, only 20% of responding institutions reported being adequately staffed.¹⁹ These conditions have led many student affairs professionals to consider leaving higher education, including 56% of individuals responding to The Forum’s survey of Individual International Educators during September-October 2022.^{19,20} Although no easy solutions exist, The Forum on Education Abroad seeks to understand and address capacity issues as examined in the white paper entitled: [*The Changing Needs and Realities of Current and Future International Educators*](#).

Institutional Assumptions

Respondents also cited that institutional assumptions about the needs and interests of nontraditional learners can lead to the deprioritization and under appreciation of education abroad as a high impact experience for this population. Ironically, some respondents shared that they felt students understood the value of education abroad even when other offices and departments did not. One respondent wrote:

“ I think students understand the value of education abroad; however, institutional barriers and systemic oppressions (sic) make it more difficult for nontraditional students to participate in education abroad experiences.

Interestingly, even when the organization has sufficient resources to serve nontraditional learners, decision makers in other offices may miss opportunities to inform nontraditional students about education abroad. One respondent shared:

“ I think that our organization has the human resources but they are not fully mobilized because sometimes people in decision making positions don’t see the whole picture. For example, I work in the education abroad office at my school and I learned yesterday that neither I, nor any of my colleagues, have been given a day and time slot to present or even table during the transfer student orientation.

¹⁶ Forum on Education Abroad (2022). *2021 State of the field update* [Infographic].

<https://forumea.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-SOF-Follow-up-COVID-response-data.pdf>

¹⁷ McClure, K. R. (2021, September 27). Higher ed, we’ve got a morale problem—and a free t-shirt won’t fix it. *EdSurge*.

<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2021-09-27-higher-ed-we-ve-got-a-morale-problem-and-a-free-t-shirt-won-t-fix-it>

¹⁸ McClure, K. R. (2022, December 2). Higher ed is a land of dead-end jobs: Colleges have done a spectacularly bad job of managing talent. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/higher-ed-is-a-land-of-dead-end-jobs>

¹⁹ Forum on Education Abroad (2023). *2022 State of the field report*. <https://www.forumea.org/state-of-the-field.html>

²⁰ Brown, S. (2022, March 22). Many student-affairs officials are considering leaving the field. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/many-student-affairs-officials-are-considering-leaving-the-field>



Respondents' concerns about institutional assumptions turning into barriers for nontraditional students to learn about and access education abroad reinforces the importance of building strategic collaboration with offices that serve nontraditional learners.

Requested Resources

The survey asked respondents to consider two aspects regarding resources needed to support the nontraditional learner: first, what resources/tools are needed to communicate the value of education abroad to nontraditional learners; and second, what resources/tools needed to expand education abroad access to nontraditional learners.

In considering communicating the value of education abroad, respondents expanded their audience beyond nontraditional learners to add their colleagues in other offices and administrators who make resource decisions. Although various ideas for targeted marketing to nontraditional learners were discussed (e.g., student stories, access to contact lists) communicating the value often centered on future career benefits and the need for funding resources.

Career and Curricular Integration Resources

When asked to respond to the prompt, "What are the resources/tools you and/or your organization need to communicate the value of education abroad to nontraditional learners?", respondents indicated resources tying education abroad to the curriculum and career outcomes was a common theme. Although the academic and career themes could be seen as separate resource needs, linking the two appeared in the responses as time to degree completion and subsequent entrance into the labor market, and academically aligned experiences that could bolster career prospects. As a result of this co-occurrence, curricular and career integration are explored together.

Communicating the value of education abroad emerged as a theme. Respondents envisioned resources to communicate value to nontraditional learners that answered common questions that practitioners face in higher education environments focused on degree completion and career outcomes. One respondent was concerned about the following:

“How to best link the experience to career aspirations; how the experience will be incorporated into degree studies without increasing time to degree or overall cost of attendance...”

Increased time to degree is another important consideration as it involves additional tuition and the opportunity cost of post-graduation lost earnings. As such, education abroad programs that do not align with degree requirements and delay entry into the workforce may be perceived



negatively by students and by academic advisers/administrators who are charged with maintaining and increasing timely graduation rates.

Other respondents sought resources to link education abroad to career interests, skill development, career outcomes (e.g., job offers, salary), and advancement opportunities, the latter being a strategy that they felt would particularly resonate with nontraditional learners. One respondent indicated that they needed *“more information on skills developed during education abroad that will be valuable to potential employers.”* Another wrote:

“Another resource or tool that could be to hear from employers about their interest in hiring employees across different roles in an organization that have intercultural competence and that education abroad is a way for student/future employers to develop those skills.

Interestingly, some of the resources that respondents sought already exist (see more in the “Recommend Resources” section). Although the need for resources and research is ongoing, including groundbreaking projects such as the work undertaken by the University of Minnesota regarding curriculum and career integration in education abroad design.^{21,22} Other sources such as the IIE’s *Gaining an Employment Edge: The Impact of Study Abroad on 21st Century Skills & Career Prospects in the United States*²³ may be beneficial given the historical knowledge lost when long-time education abroad staff exited the field during COVID-19, coupled with the reality that recent entrants to the field may be unfamiliar with this work.

Funding

Funding was a recurring theme among the responses to “What are the resources/tools you and/or your organization need to expand education abroad access to nontraditional learners?”. Concerns were primarily related to student funding to defer costs of travel and other unnamed expenses. But not all needs were about generating new sources of funding, as some respondents indicated simply wanting to learn how students could access existing benefits such as veteran’s benefits and grant aid administered through Financial Aid.

However, resourcing of education abroad offices also emerged as a theme, with one respondent sharing, *“...we would need essential dedicated Education (sic) abroad staffing and platform to effectively communicate/update nontraditional learners on education abroad experience”*.

²¹ University of Minnesota (n.d.). Career integration. Learning Abroad Center. Retrieved April 8, 2023, from <https://umabroad.umn.edu/resources/career-integration>

²² University of Minnesota (n.d.). Curriculum integration. Learning Abroad Center. Retrieved April 8, 2023, from <https://umabroad.umn.edu/resources/curriculum-integration>

²³ Farrugia, C. & Sanger, J. (2017). *Gaining an employment edge: The impact of study abroad on 21st century skills & career prospects in the United States*. Institute of International Education. <https://www.iie.org/publications/gaining-an-employment-edge-the-impact-of-study-abroad/>



The student funding and staff capacity are connected as avenues such as scholarships, grant aid, and veteran's benefits help students offset costs, but staffing is needed to identify and communicate to nontraditional learners who may be unaware that education abroad experiences exist and can benefit them personally and professionally.

Recommended Resources

This section demonstrates that there are not many resources readily available on this topic. We have provided concrete links where possible, but it is worth noting that some resources sit behind a paywall, which demonstrates that more free-access resources are needed. We have categorized what resources we have found into the following sections: Promotional/Marketing Information, Academic Research, and Applied Resources.

Promotional/Marketing Information

One of the first steps to increasing the number of nontraditional learners participating in education abroad is to get their attention. These populations need to understand that international experiences are not for just "traditional" college students and that there are a variety of ways in which to participate in education abroad. Websites such as GoAbroad.com offer short and easily digestible articles that can quickly spark a student's interest in studying abroad. Once nontraditional learners start to see themselves as potential education abroad students, the education abroad office can initiate deeper conversations with them about why studying abroad could benefit them, both academically and in their future careers.

- Go Overseas: [A Guide to Non-Traditional Study Abroad Programs](#)
- Go Abroad: [Study Abroad for Adults - Yes, It's a Real Thing](#)
- Independent blogs like this one: [The Discoverer: Study Abroad as an Adult](#)

It is clear from this list that while there are a handful of links, this is not an area that receives wide promotion or marketing attention.

Academic Research

In order to make the most of advising sessions with nontraditional students, advisors need to come prepared with as much research-based information as possible. While our working group cannot provide more time or increased staffing for overwhelmed offices, we can offer easier access to research that has previously been conducted on supporting nontraditional learners as well as information to help them communicate the value of education abroad.

Several key reports and resource repositories focus on employability and the value of education abroad, which is helpful in advocating for wider access:



- The Forum on Education Abroad: [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)
- Gateway International Group: [Foundational Reading for Education Abroad & Employability](#)
- IIE: [Gaining an Employment Edge: The Impact of Study Abroad on 21st Century Skills & Career Prospects in the United States](#)
- IIE: [Underrepresented Students in US Study Abroad: Investigating Impacts](#)
- *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*: [Increasing diversity in international education: Programming for nontraditional students through an alternative curriculum model](#)

Applied Resources

Even though these resources are helpful for professionals who are eager to increase their understanding of how to support nontraditional learners, this knowledge ultimately needs to be applied. Again, a lack of time and staffing often prevents this from happening. This is where we can turn to our peers in the education abroad field who have already been able to put theory into practice, to see how they are using their understanding of the unique needs of nontraditional learners to better provide access to education abroad. This can be as simple as ensuring that an education abroad office's website includes a page dedicated to identity abroad resources.

The Study Abroad and Global Engagement office at the University of Kansas has an [Identity Abroad](#) section on their website, which includes pages specifically for nontraditional learners such as: Veterans, Active Duty, and ROTC; Students with Children; and Adult Learners and nontraditional Students. They list important questions that learners with these various identities should consider when contemplating education abroad, as well as links to other helpful resources. This is just one example of an institution that has been able to use their understanding of the unique needs and concerns of nontraditional learners in order to expand access to and communicate the value of education abroad.

There are also helpful one-off articles for professionals in the field, like NAFSA's [Helping Military Veterans Study Abroad](#), which outline the importance of supporting veterans through the process and working across areas/offices on campus to do so. They also outline the need to work with the Department of Veterans Affairs to make education abroad simpler for veteran students.

While general strategies exist for Education Abroad Advocacy, such as The Forum's *Strategies for EA Advocacy paper*, it is clear that a resource specifically focused on the area of nontraditional learners is needed. The dearth of applied resources demonstrates that we need to develop more resources in order to support nontraditional students to access education abroad opportunities.



Call to Action

Our working group surveyed those working in education abroad to better understand challenges faced and resources currently being used to support nontraditional learners. Our aim was to identify gaps in resources and support and increase access to education abroad to nontraditional learners. Thus far, we have shared the results of this survey, highlighted the work of our colleagues, and made known current practices that could be replicated in other institutions and programs.

Common barriers noted in our survey results included capacity limitations in international offices and their institutions, a lack of resources or knowledge of resources available, understanding benefits to specific groups of nontraditional learners, and how to access relevant funding sources. After identifying gaps in resources and tools, we suggest a call to action to increase outreach and access to nontraditional education abroad students.

We recognize that the charge of this paper is broad and vast, and that we have only scratched the surface. It is evident that there are positive outcomes for traditional learners who participate in education abroad. It is incumbent on education abroad professionals to educate themselves so we can share this data with colleagues to increase institutional knowledge of the impact and documented outcomes through education abroad experiences. By sharing resources, collaborating across offices within our institutions, and supporting further program development, we can advocate for nontraditional participants and expand access to the benefits of education abroad to nontraditional learners.

We call upon our colleagues to work around the limited capacity of our offices to prioritize these disparate groups of students by using all the resources in their power because small changes can lead to big changes. For example, reaching out to the Financial Aid office to better understand the needs and benefits of nontraditional learners is an opportunity to share the benefits of education abroad and pool resources to identify opportunities to support students throughout their time enrolled. These relationships can be expanded to reach our colleagues at other institutions.

As we have seen, tailoring materials to specific audiences is an important step in reaching out to students who are not included in traditional education abroad materials. As we discussed above, external websites like GoAbroad.com can be used to initiate conversations with nontraditional students, without taxing the already time-challenged staff in education abroad offices. Utilizing all materials available also ensures that limited funding and resources go towards advising and programming, instead of shiny marketing materials that serve a small portion of students on campus.

Our hope is to bring these issues to the forefront and identify existing resources that can be used by others. We hope that this is the start of an ongoing dialogue to refocus the work of



education abroad professionals to meet the needs of all students and share the available research on the benefits of education abroad widely. Resources currently exist in relevant areas that “circle around” some of the issues we have identified and support of some of the populations we aim to support in our charge. However, research remains limited and current resources are helpful, but static (i.e., articles and pointers) and many sources are more than a decade old. The Forum for Education Abroad is committed to continuing to expand access to resources in this area.

Finally, we call upon leadership in higher education to provide tangible support by prioritizing this work at higher institutional levels, providing more funding to subsidize programs so they are more accessible, investing in more dedicated staffing and more time made available to move this work forward. Given the breadth and depth of the work involved in this area, it is essential that university leaders commit tangible resources to these efforts. Supporting nontraditional learners in their education abroad journey requires specificity, specialized knowledge, institutional support, and adequate resources, all of which can only be accessed if tangible structures are prioritized.

