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Seattle U Continues to Suspend Study Abroad Programs Through 2021

Will Stein, Author

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to uproot the academic school year, students hoping to study abroad during fall quarter 2021 will no longer be able to. The Education Abroad Office (EAO) announced April 28 Seattle University's decision to continue suspending all education abroad programming through fall quarter and winter break of 2021.

This announcement largely impacted students and faculty alike. Although the European Union will allow vaccinated tourists to enter the continent by June of this year, the university remains stern on its decision.

The Director of the EAO, Gina Lopardo, explained her disappointment for students unable to study abroad.

"We work hard to offer these impactful experiences to students but keep hitting a wall with the suspensions," Lopardo said in an email statement. "It is not just a let down for the students who were planning to study abroad, but also for our team. Our Education Abroad Advisors come to know their advisees and their motivations to study abroad well. Program participation has been suspended each break and quarter from summer 2020 through winter break 2021. That's a lot of bad news to deliver to eager participants."

Lopardo continued by stating that everyone at the EAO understands how important studying abroad can be for a Jesuit education. Despite the setbacks, they will continue their work and offer information sessions and advising appointments to students looking for education abroad options beyond winter break 2021.

For Zachary Wood, a public affairs professor, the news did not come as a complete surprise. Wood has helped lead an urban development class in Germany for multiple years while teaching at Rutgers University and was hoping to bring the program to Seattle U.

"I expected it. I had initially gotten this course approved for spring 2020," Wood said.

He explained how he tried to vocalize concerns with students interested in the program.

"I entered it as transparently as possible, letting students know that it wasn't likely to go through this spring," Wood said.

Wood explained that while he was cautiously optimistic about study abroad programs starting up again, he will continue to keep an eye on what vaccination numbers and availability look like in other countries, along with what virus spread looks like when abroad programs can recommence.



Jordie Simpson

"I think the most important piece for this is that each location [study abroad] trips might go to are in very different circumstances right now," Wood said. "I hope that we enter into the post-pandemic world cautiously, even beyond study abroad."

Despite the uncertainty and confusion, Wood said he will continue to prepare for his next abroad program until he hears otherwise.

While staff and instructors try their best to plan a realistic timeline of when education abroad programs will be up and running again, some students are left in difficult positions.

Danielle Miller, a second-year Spanish major, had initially planned to study abroad in fall 2020.

"I was obviously disappointed, but more so I was thinking, 'what now?'" Miller said.

Miller explained that Seattle U does not offer the level of courses that she would have taken in her abroad program, leading to her taking upper-level courses in her second year, as opposed to taking a year off of Spanish classes altogether.

"My current hope is to go in the fall of my senior year. Hopefully, that will give everything enough time to chill out and be safe again. But if that doesn't work, then I don't know what's going to happen," Miller said.

While some have had to place their study abroad plans on hold for a year or two, some have had to cancel their plans altogether. Jaida Rose Hanson, who graduated in winter quarter 2021, had to forfeit studying abroad altogether due to the pandemic.

"I feel like I shouldn't have put it off, I know there was no way to know, but I wish I hadn't waited until my junior or senior year to study abroad," Hanson said. "Even though I can't study abroad, I still want to travel, so it will just have to be outside of the university now."

Students in their third and fourth years will be graduating shortly, and as the quarters continue to come and go, so does the opportunity to study abroad. For now, students and faculty will need to reevaluate their abroad programs through the rest of 2021.