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**GUEST EDITORIAL****N4A Appeal for Student Athletes to Study Abroad**

**Ken Baron, Ph.D.**  
**Consultant, Baron Mentors**  
**National Certified Counselor (NCC)**  
**National Certified Career Counselor (NCCC)**

Dear Members of the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletes (N4A):

Because you are leaders and facilitators of genuine student development for collegiate student athletes in the United States, the following is an appeal to you for the promotion of study abroad as a worthwhile and feasible academic endeavor for your constituency. While it is well understood that significant challenges with schedules, scholarships, financial aid and a host of serious regulatory and compliance matters have curtailed study abroad as a viable option for many student athletes in the past, the concern for us all is about the future. The implications for student athletes considering the momentous and well documented forces of *globalization* not only in reshaping our institutions but within multiple facets of our economic, cultural, and spiritual lives is daunting.

To be sure, mission statements, curricular revision, quality assurance measures, research agendas and various institutional and corporate partnerships have all been influenced by the internationalization of our campuses. Campus projections, goals and objectives associated with targeted increases in study abroad participation are very much a reality throughout the nation. According to a 2004 report produced by the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) – member institutions have been challenged to “triple” the number of students participating in study abroad by 2010.

Thus in light of this major change unfolding before us on our campuses, how should those of us involved in the role of academic planning with student athletes respond as advisers, educators, mentors and leaders? Perhaps this rhetorical question may seem familiar? In a similar manner, the “career maturity” debate of the 1970’s, 80’s and 90’s - which compared the nature of the *academic* and *social* lives of student-athletes with those of non student-athletes - may have already provided us with some

ideas. To be sure, one significant conclusion from the career maturity deliberations was that student-athletes were often not able to benefit from the full-range of activities, facilities and opportunities that colleges and universities provided. And in this case, the academic and athletic communities recognized that systematic "insularity" was negatively impacting student athletes with respect to their overall career development.

As a result, significant reforms have taken place with respect to student housing, academic support, career development and mentoring programs designed to improve the overall quality and "equality" of student-athletes' collegiate experience. Learning from these lessons, it is possible that successful study abroad facilitation for student-athletes will require a similar concerted effort by those most directly involved in the construction of both the academic and social lives of student athletes. As members of the N4A, and as leaders on your campuses, you, perhaps better than anyone else on your campuses, understand and can hopefully navigate through the intricate financial, regulatory and logistical barriers in order to strategically assist those student athletes who want to pursue study abroad at some point during their tenure. This will not be an easy role to fulfill, yet the dialog and action planning needs to start somewhere. Given your skill set, your passion for fairness and your historical willingness to act as standard-bearers for the welfare of student athletes and the integrity of their educational experience, the following short-term and long-term suggestions are provided for you below:

### Short -Term Strategies:

- *Schedule a meeting with an administrator from the international education or study abroad office on your campus to find out more about the kinds of study abroad programs your campus currently provides or is affiliated with.*
- *During the meeting attempt to secure specific details about key semesters, quarters and terms (especially summer opportunities) that could be utilized both practically and strategically (considering various sports and playing seasons).*
- *Explore study abroad course offerings that would easily meet general education requirements (lower and upper division) as well as*

*standard courses within popular academic majors. Programs with articulation agreements in place would be ideal!*

- *Attempt writing a preliminary "blue print" study abroad model that you believe could be undertaken by a select category of student-athletes. Perhaps considering (at least initially) a sport, coaching staff, and season most amenable to such an endeavor.*
- *Invite a cross-section of respected institutional colleagues from various departments to critically assess your preliminary plan. This group should include key individuals from academic departments, records and registration, financial aid, and international education as well as from athletics.*

After organizing, critiquing and revising your prospective study abroad plan you should have a more realistic sense of how such a plan could be implemented (again, perhaps with just a small, select group of student-athlete participants), as well as any significant measures that still need to be resolved in order to move forward. Like any *new* initiative (within any collegiate operation) expect some resistance and a certain number of "naysayers" who will undoubtedly attempt to slow down or stop any momentum you have worked hard to set in motion. Hence, garnering and fostering the good will and positive energy from campus supporters and advocates will be critical to your ultimate success. The good news is that other forward-thinking campus leaders at your colleges and universities will also be looking for partners to collaborate with as the focus (and in many cases – requirement) on *internationalization* becomes a priority consideration at all institutional levels. Thus looking to the future, the following are long-term measures for N4A member consideration in your efforts to internationalize their departments and establish study abroad opportunities for your student-athlete constituencies:

- *Become involved in any internationalization commissions or standing committee's that already exist (or that evolve), or become appointed to a committee on your respective campuses. Your participation will enable you to "spotlight" your intentions, have your obstacles officially "recorded for institutional purposes," and establish campus-wide partnerships.*
- *Inform your college or university president of your intention to assist student-athletes in pursuing study abroad opportunities. Their*

*awareness of your actions and "values" as a progressive, academic athletic advisor will be welcomed and may also establish an important link through which both challenges and successes can be communicated.*

In conclusion, the academic athletic advising community is applauded for your continued leadership and commitment towards student-athlete equality and equity. You serve an integral role advocating on behalf of student athletes as campus administrations begin to significantly raise the bar on study abroad participation. Without your attention and support, your student-athletes could easily be left out of the discussion and without a plan. The nature and scope of education provided at our campuses will be changing considerably during the next decades – including a growing expectation of study abroad becoming an actual requirement for graduation at our most reputable institutions. Thank you for this forum to launch this important discussion. Further dialog and collaboration with the N4A membership is welcomed.