

Study Abroad and Exchange Programs

VA education benefits cannot be used for participation in a student exchange program. Due to the nature of such programs, where two institutions “trade” guest students from each other to allow each respective student to study at the other school, VA funds cannot be used to fund participation in exchange programs. There is no way in such an arrangement to guarantee that the other school’s student would also be a VA education beneficiary using his/her benefits during the exchange period.

VA education benefits can be used for studies in another country under certain circumstances which do not involve an exchange student arrangement. (Note: VA approves *programs*, not schools.)

VA uses the term ***study abroad*** to broadly reference taking courses in a foreign country. Please be aware of the manner in which the term is used when reviewing VA information about this topic, as the VA use of *study abroad* functionally includes both traditional study abroad programs offered by institutions of higher learning and all other iterations of studying in foreign countries.

Effective August 1, 2020, VA benefits can only be used to study abroad for enrollment in the following circumstances:

Direct enrollment in a foreign school’s degree program

A VA education beneficiary can enroll as a degree-seeking student in an approved program at a foreign school.

- The beneficiary must be enrolled as a degree-seeking student at the foreign school.
- The program at the foreign school must be approved for the use of VA education benefits.
- Enrollment is reported to VA by the foreign school.

Attending a foreign school as a guest student while pursuing a degree at a U.S. school

A VA education beneficiary can enroll as a guest student at a foreign school if the U.S. school agrees to accept specific courses at the foreign school to satisfy degree requirements at the U.S. school. This option requires coordination between the U.S. school (the “parent” school) and the foreign school.

- The guest student arrangement **cannot** be used for participation in a traditional study abroad arrangement facilitated by the domestic parent school. The guest student arrangement requires the student to enroll in the foreign school; tuition for the period of foreign enrollment must be charged to the student by the foreign school (the domestic parent school cannot be involved in charging, collecting or paying tuition to/from the foreign school).
- The beneficiary must be enrolled in a degree program at the parent school.
 - The beneficiary’s degree program must be approved for the use of VA education benefits.

- The foreign school's policies must permit the beneficiary to enroll as a non-degree-seeking student.
 - Some schools will not permit enrollment of foreign students who are *not* degree-seeking students. Enrollment requirements are determined by each school; VA cannot require foreign schools to permit such enrollment.
- All courses taken at the foreign school must be applicable to requirements of the beneficiary's degree program.
- The parent school must provide the foreign school a letter which identifies the specific classes that will be accepted to satisfy degree requirements.
 - These are the only classes for which the foreign school can report enrollment to VA.
- The foreign school must have at least one program approved for the use of VA education benefits (you would not have to actually enroll in the approved program; however, the program approval is necessary to establish that the use of VA education benefits is permitted at the foreign school).
- Enrollment in the foreign school's courses is reported to VA by the foreign school.
- Enrollment in the parent school's courses is reported to VA by the parent school.

Participating in a program provided under contract between a foreign school and a U.S. school

A VA education beneficiary can study at an approved foreign school in accordance with an approved contract arrangement with a U.S. school. Such an arrangement involves students attending a portion of the degree program at a foreign school. The inclusion of this study abroad/contract arrangement in a degree program must be specified in the VA approval of the degree program.

- The beneficiary must be enrolled in a degree program that is approved for the use of VA education benefits.
- Completion of the study abroad arrangement must satisfy a requirement for completion of the student's degree program.
- Contract agreements between the U.S. school and the foreign school must be approved by the State Approving Agency of jurisdiction for the U.S. school conferring the degree.
 - Programs involving contract arrangements between two schools require separate approval from individual/stand-alone degrees with the same names offered by the involved schools. If a school offers a degree of the same name as both a proprietary degree and as a degree requiring completion of specified coursework completed at a specified foreign institution, each iteration of the degree is considered a different program for VA education program approval purposes and must be approved separately. *Example: A U.S. school offers a proprietary MBA which can be completed in entirety at the U.S. school and also offers a joint MBA which requires students to complete specific coursework at a designated foreign school. Even if the proprietary/stand-alone MBA program is approved for the use of VA education benefits, VA education benefits cannot be used for enrollment in the MBA program that includes a contract arrangement*

with another school until the contract/joint MBA is approved at both involved schools.

- All courses taken at the foreign school must be part of the beneficiary's degree program.
- Unique approval requirements apply to the part of a program offered at the foreign school and the "deemed approved" authority which applies to degree programs at many public/not-for-profit U.S. institutions **does not** apply to programs at foreign schools. Ensure the approval status for the version of the degree which involves the contract arrangement with a foreign school before attempting to use VA education benefits for enrollment in this type of program.
- Enrollment during the study abroad period is reported to VA by the foreign school.

Participating in a trip abroad as part of a class; the trip is arranged and taught entirely by a U.S. school

A VA education beneficiary can attend courses offered by their U.S. school which are taught in a foreign country. An example of such an arrangement is a class in art history which includes an extended field trip to visit art schools and museums in Europe, led by an employee of the U.S. school.

- The beneficiary must be enrolled in a degree program that is approved for the use of VA education benefits.
- The trip must be facilitated entirely by an employee of the U.S. school.
 - The employee of the U.S. school must be present and involved for the duration of the trip abroad.
- Enrollment for the class which includes the trip abroad is reported to VA by the U.S. school.

VA education benefits cannot be used for the following *under any circumstances*:

- Charges for the services of third-party agents (commercial study abroad facilitators, tour companies, travel brokers, guide services, etc.) hired to coordinate travel or any portion of the study abroad experience;
- Fees charged for participation in a student exchange program;
- Enrollment in any program which has not been approved for the use of VA education benefits;
- Airfare;
- Travel-related fees; and
- Room and board charges (including hotel accommodations during study abroad-related travel).

Note: The guest student arrangement **cannot** be used for participation in a traditional study abroad arrangement facilitated by the domestic parent school. The permissible guest student arrangement requires the student to enroll in the foreign school; tuition for the period of foreign enrollment must be charged to the student by the foreign school (the domestic parent school cannot be involved in charging, collecting or paying tuition to/from the foreign school). This arrangement allows beneficiaries to use VA benefits while completing classes required for graduation at a school other than the school

conferring their degree. Credit for classes completed at the non-primary school must be accepted by the parent school as transfer credit. Dual degrees, joint degrees, inter-institutional exchange agreements, open-enrollment educational partnerships, consortium contracts and other such arrangements wherein some instruction is provided by the school conferring a degree and a *predefined* portion of the degree's required coursework is completed at one or more schools other than the school conferring the degree are contract arrangements which require separate VA approval before VA education benefits can be used. Contract arrangements are not the same as guest student arrangements.