

Dear future study abroad family member:

Sending a child off to college and then to study abroad far away are two joyous and painful rituals; I can testify that the transitions are not easy or simple.

However, I can also testify that you will survive. As a parent, my goal is for my student to become an independent, resilient, and well-educated citizen who will play a valuable role in our world's future.

At the University of Denver (DU), about 70% of students will study abroad at some point in their college experience. When my son applied to DU, he began talking about "when" he was going abroad. I was experiencing anxiety thinking about him leaving home, and I couldn't imagine him ever being an ocean away from me. Yet, with good planning and the [Office of International Education \(OIE\)](#) at DU, both my son and our entire family thoroughly enjoyed his time studying abroad.

What can you do to help them succeed?

Each and every student and parent will experience these major transitions differently. I can't offer categorical advice, since each of you knows your student best, however, here is my best shot: *Your student will be able to step forward*

when you step back. Your student needs to strike out on their own, to develop and to grow, to discover who they are and what they can become - and they can only do this by making their own choices and their own mistakes.

Choosing which school and which program they want to apply for is the first step where your student can step forward. Having discussions about the benefits of certain countries and program structures helped my son make his decision of which school was the best choice for him. Ultimately, though, the research and decision-making was in my son's court.

Keeping track of all the deadlines, preparing all the paperwork and attending all the required presentations to study abroad was up to my son to manage. I surmised that if he couldn't keep track of these items at DU, then he wouldn't be ready to travel abroad and keep track of many more important issues while studying abroad.

I was surprised by the millions of preparations needed to go abroad. I wanted to step in and plan everything. My son has life threatening food allergies, and I had been involved with his medical care since he was a baby. I was ready to take the reins and ensure his safety, not only medically, but in planning every other part of his journey in preparing to study abroad. This would have robbed him of the ability to learn independence, self-sufficiency and self-advocacy. These are great

life lessons along the path of planning for study abroad, while at DU, that will then translate into action studying at an overseas university.

As a parent, I had to remember to keep things in perspective, and to express my desire for communication before my son left. Most of the conversations we had were about all the great things he was experiencing, and the new people he was meeting. A few times he had struggles he was working through, and it was difficult to listen and to be supportive of him and to not try to fix the situation. It is normal for a student to complain about their new home and I had to learn to coach my son to see the world from a different view, but also to advocate for himself if he needed guidance.

Before your student leaves for study abroad, have an agreed upon method of communicating – text, phone call, Skype, a particular app, email or whatever form works best for you and your student. An agreed upon amount of communication – once a week, for example - can help quell anxiety on the part of the parent and the student.

While abroad, your student will learn to manage time, priorities and maybe even cook for themselves while abroad. Cheer for your student's successes, and let them know how proud you are of them to be brave enough to try new experiences.

You should also be aware that the University offers a number of [resources](#) for students to help them with both academic and personal problems and questions, should that become necessary.

When your student returns home, you will undoubtedly see a more capable and independent adult. Enjoy this special time!

Respectfully, Nicole Smith

DU Parent of Morgan Smith, Class of 2018



Morgan, the morning before he left to study abroad