

COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION  
RESEARCH INITIATIVE

# FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDY ABROAD

## STRATEGIES AND PARTICIPATION

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# INTRODUCTION

Study abroad, off-campus study in a foreign country that results in academic credit (Forum on Education Abroad, 2025), has long been recognized as a high-impact educational practice fostering positive educational and developmental outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds (Kuh, 2008; Schneider, 2009). These experiences involve significant time commitment from students, meaningful communication with classmates and faculty, exposure to diverse ideas and people, and opportunities to apply knowledge outside the classroom (Kilgo et al., 2015). In the community college context, previous research documents the impact of study abroad on student outcomes such as academic success (e.g., Whatley & González Canché, 2022), clarification of career goals (e.g., Raby et al., 2014; Wood & Raby, 2021), and social capital development (Fischer & Raby, 2023).

At the same time, students often cite affordability as their reason for not pursuing study abroad (e.g., DeJong et al., 2010; Fornerino et al., 2011), and community college international education leaders point to funding as key to both program development and maintenance (Raby et al., 2023). Lack of funding is a particularly significant barrier to study abroad at community colleges. Since these colleges often serve a greater number of students from lower-income backgrounds, limited financial resources restrict their ability to provide study abroad opportunities that match their mission of broad access to international education (Kisker et al., 2023; Whatley & Raby, 2020).

We currently know very little about how community colleges financially support student study abroad participation, and research has not explored the extent to which funding models contribute to variations in student participation. For example, colleges that provide specific assistance to students to apply for aid like the [Gilman International Scholarship Program](#) may see increased study abroad participation.

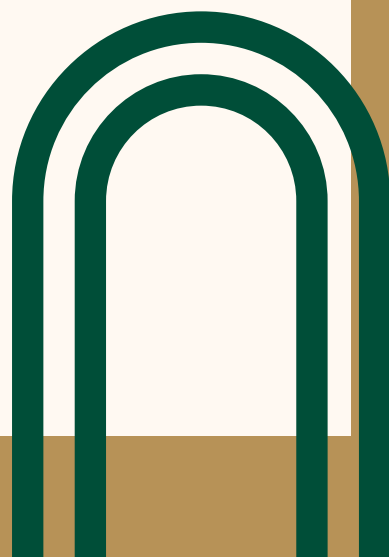
# REPORT OVERVIEW

The purpose of the study described in this report is twofold:

1. To document how community colleges financially support study abroad participation
2. To explore possible associations between financial support models for study abroad and the percentage of students who participate

This study's primary data source consisted of survey data collected between April and June 2025 from a nationally-representative sample of community colleges that offer study abroad opportunities. This survey collected information about colleges' study abroad offerings, experience implementing study abroad programs, number of participants in the 2023-24 academic year, and approaches to providing financial support. In total, 324 survey participation invitations were sent to potential participants, each representing a college that offered study abroad. We received 71 unique responses (response rate=21.9%). Overall, 39 survey participants completed the full survey and 56 survey participants completed a sufficient number of questions to be included in this study's analyses. More information about the study's data and our analysis can be found in this report's Appendix A.

The results of our study are presented in the following two sections. The first summarizes what we learned about how community colleges financially support study abroad participation. The second describes our results for study abroad participation.



# HOW DO COMMUNITY COLLEGES FINANCIALLY SUPPORT STUDY ABROAD?

Figures 1 through 5 summarize information about how community colleges financially support study abroad participation. As Figure 1 shows, the majority of colleges in our sample (89%) provide some sort of financial support for study abroad, while the remaining 11% do not.

Among the colleges that provide financial support, 33 (66%) offer scholarships, wherein funds go directly to students' accounts, nine (18%) offer grants, wherein funds reduce the cost of study abroad, and 29 (58%) provide support to help students apply for funding from entities outside the college, such as Gilman Scholarships, a U.S. Department of State program that supports students with limited financial means to study or participate in an internship abroad (Figure 2).

Regarding financial support amount (Figure 3), around 40% of colleges typically offer support over \$1,000, while an additional 13% generally offer support between \$800 and \$1,000. Other colleges offer lower support amounts, with 20% of colleges providing support in the amount of around \$400 or less, and an additional 18% offering support that is usually between \$400 and \$600. The remaining 9% of colleges offered financial support most frequently in amounts between \$600 and \$800.

When it comes to applying for and receiving financial support for study abroad, most survey respondents (62.5%) indicated that students have to apply for financial support separately from their study abroad application (Figure 4). An additional 20% do not require an application for financial support at all, while the remaining 17.5% use a process wherein students apply for financial support simultaneously with their application to study abroad.

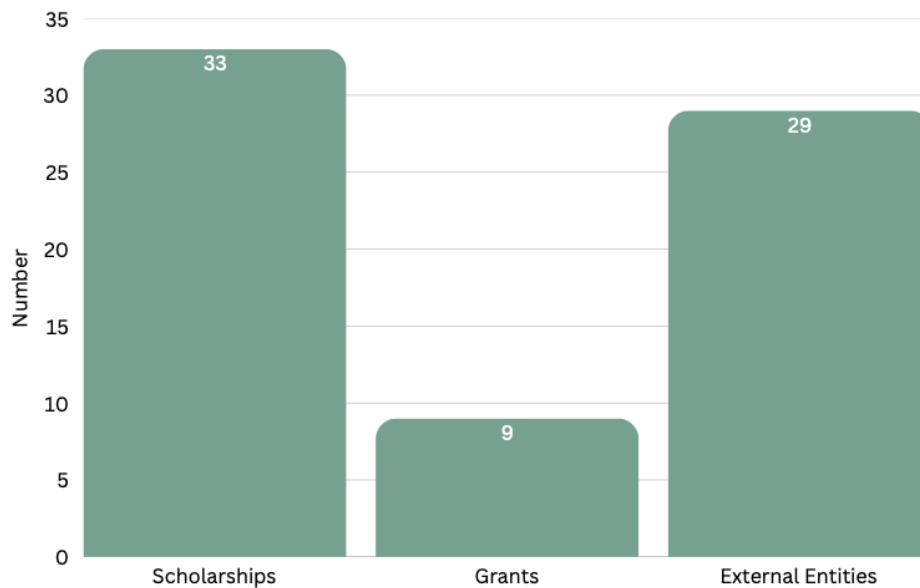
Students who receive financial support learn about funding along different timelines with reference to their study abroad experience (Figure 5). Over a quarter (28%) of respondents indicated that students learn they have financial support for their study abroad experience before they make their first deposit for the program, while an additional 26% indicated that students are aware they have financial support as soon as they express any interest in study abroad. Twenty-one percent indicated that students learn about financial support after they make their first deposit to a study abroad program and 5% do not learn about financial support until after they pay the full program amount. The remaining 19% of respondents indicated that the timeline for disbursing financial support for study abroad is different every year at their institution.

Figure 1: Does your college offer financial support for study abroad?



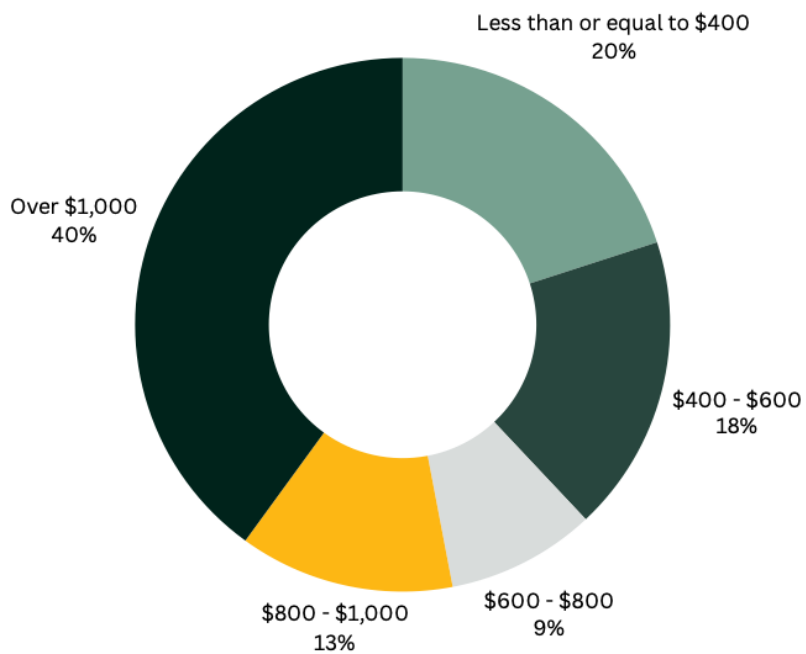
Community College International Education Research Initiative. Based on N=56 survey responses.

Figure 2: How does your college provide financial support for study abroad?



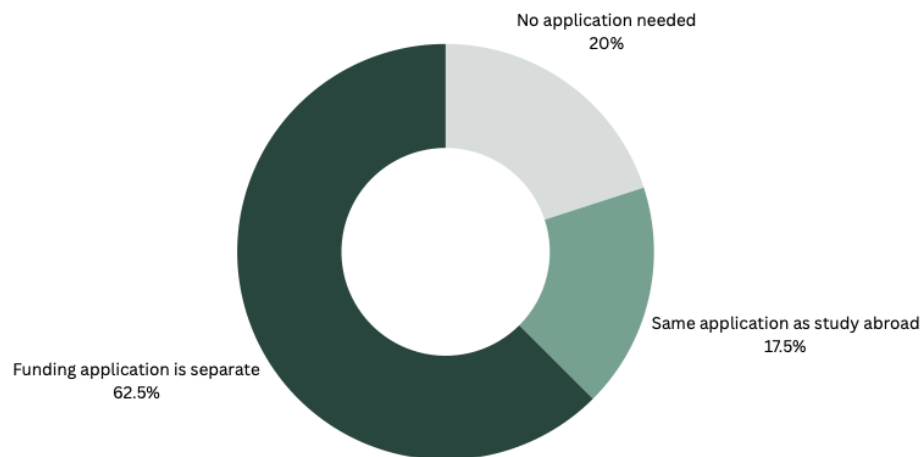
Community College International Education Research Initiative. Based on N=50 survey responses (multiple selections possible).

**Figure 3: What is the typical amount of funding students receive for study abroad?**



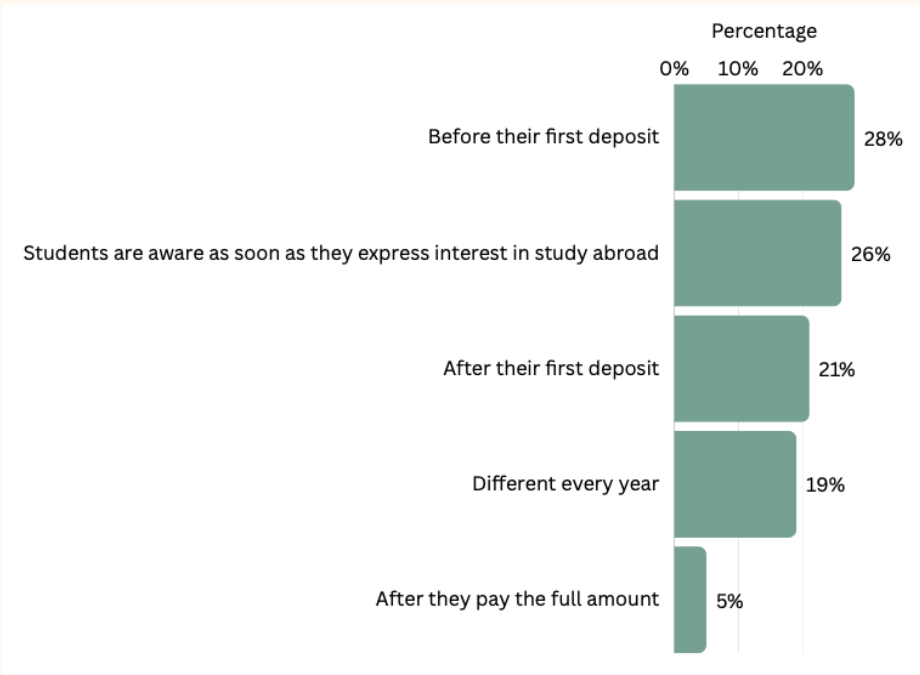
Community College International Education Research Initiative. Based on N=45 survey responses.

**Figure 4: How do students apply for financial support to study abroad?**



Community College International Education Research Initiative. Based on N=40 survey responses.

**Figure 5: How do students learn they have received financial support for study abroad?**



Community College International Education Research Initiative.. Based on N=42 survey responses.

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND STUDY ABROAD PARTICIPATION

Although our survey captured both whether and how community colleges provide financial support for study abroad, the results of our statistical analyses indicate that there is no significant relationship between whether a college offers financial support and the percentage of students who participated. Similarly, our results suggest that the way in which financial support is offered is not related to the general participation rate (see Appendix B for a results table). Although these results are surprising at first glance, they align with previous research that indicates that financial support is not the only, or even the most important, barrier to or facilitator for study abroad (e.g., Swentzel, 2012; Whatley & Stich, 2021).



# KEY TAKEAWAYS AND IMPLICATIONS

## TAKEAWAY #1

While removing financial support for study abroad is certainly not encouraged, our results suggest that current institutional strategies for helping students afford study abroad are perhaps not as effective as intended. These results also suggest that financial support is not the only or even the most important factor that explains the extent to which students at a particular community college study abroad.

## TAKEAWAY #2

Students likely have other reasons for not participating in study abroad that are not related to finances, such as family and/or work responsibilities that they cannot leave for an extended period or perceptions that study abroad is not intended for people with their backgrounds or valuable to their academic/career goals. Students may also have anxiety around the idea of study abroad that ultimately prevents them from participating, particularly if they do not know anyone who has traveled abroad before.

## TAKEAWAY #3

We encourage community college international educators to consider barriers to study abroad participation that cannot be resolved with grants, scholarships, or other forms of financial support and think creatively about alternative solutions.

- Perceptions of who is meant to study abroad: If students believe study abroad is not “for people like them,” expanded funding alone will not shift participation.
- Promotional materials: Materials used to promote study abroad may inadvertently communicate to students, faculty, administrators, and staff who advise students that study abroad is only intended for certain students with particular academic or career goals. Additionally, these materials may not effectively convey the value of study abroad.

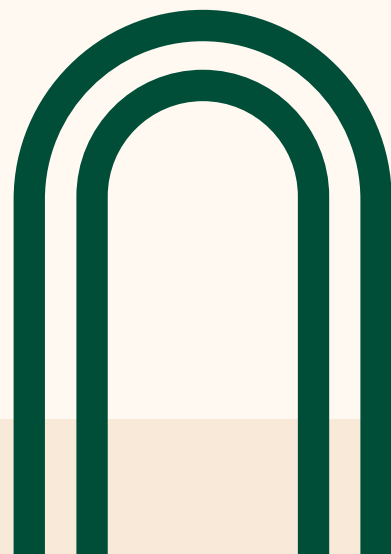
- Information availability: Students may not receive sufficient information about study abroad programs, or this information may not be provided sufficiently in advance for students to make plans to participate.

#### **TAKEAWAY #4**

We also encourage community college international educators to consider what motivates students to study abroad and what factors enable the students who do participate. These results suggest that those motivating factors are more important than finances.

#### **TAKEAWAY #5**

Even when financial support is available, the funding levels may not be enough to meaningfully reduce the total cost of a program, which could limit its impact on participation.



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# APPENDIX A: DATA AND ANALYSIS

## Data

This research relies on data from three sources: a unique survey, the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), and the Community College International Education Research Initiative's (CCIERI) community college international education inventory (Nyarko et al., 2025).

This study's survey data was collected between April and June 2025 from a nationally-representative sample of community colleges that offer study abroad, identified using the CCIERI dataset (Nyarko et al., 2025). This survey collected information about colleges' study abroad offerings, experience implementing study abroad programs, number of participants and participants' demographics in the 2023-24 academic year, and approaches to providing financial support. An initial survey participation invitation was sent to the study abroad or international education contact listed on each college's website in late April 2025, and a reminder was sent in early June 2025. In total, invitations were sent to 324 potential participants (each representing a college that offered study abroad), and we received 71 unique responses (response rate=21.9%). Although we endeavored to obtain complete survey responses from all participants, not all participants responded to all of the survey's questions, which accounts for the discrepancy in the number of observations in each analysis presented in this report. In total, 56 survey participants completed a sufficient amount of the survey to be included in this study's analyses and 39 completed the full survey.

This survey was the source of several key variables in this study, including whether and how the college offered financial support for study abroad, the amount of such support if it was available, how students applied for financial support, when financial support was disbursed, how frequently the college offered study abroad, and the amount of time the college had supported study abroad programs. This survey was also the source of information about study abroad participation numbers.

IPEDS data was used to create our study's outcome variable, which is the percentage of students studying abroad. To create this variable, we divided the number of study abroad participants reported by survey respondents by total enrollment, a variable available in IPEDS. IPEDS was also the source of several control variables for the regression analyses results that are presented in this report. These variables include: percentage of students receiving Pell funding, percentage of students who are women, percentage of students who identify as white, percentage of students under the age of 25, percentage of students enrolled part-time, percentage of students graduating with a STEM degree, and total enrollment. These data represent the 2022-23

academic year, the most recent year available at the time of this study.

The CCIERI inventory dataset was used to create a college's internationalization score, which ranged from 0 to 5. Institutions were assigned one point of this score for engaging in each of the following internationalization-related activities: virtual international exchange, international student enrollment, offering a globally-focused credential, hosting/sponsoring international-focused events and clubs on campus, and providing resources to faculty and staff to support institutional internationalization efforts. Study abroad was not included in this calculation because all the colleges included in this study offered study abroad.

## **Analysis**

The results presented in this report derive from two analytic approaches. To provide information about how community colleges financially support study abroad participation, we calculated percentages for the following variables, all derived from survey responses: whether and how the college offered financial support for study abroad, the amount of such support if it was available, how students applied for financial support, and when financial support was disbursed.

Analyses that examined the relationship between financial support and study abroad participation rate used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression so that we could control for variables aside from financial support that likely lend themselves to higher or lower study abroad participation. In total, four models were estimated. The first model used only whether a college provided financial support for study abroad as the predictor of interest. The second model included the following control variables: how frequently study abroad was offered, internationalization score, percentage of students receiving Pell funding, percentage of students who are women, percentage of students who identify as white, percentage of students under the age of 25, percentage of students enrolled part-time, percentage of students graduating with a STEM degree, and total enrollment. The third model included these same control variables and added the amount of time the college had supported study abroad programs as a predictor. These second and third models were estimated separately to account for missing survey responses for this last variable. The fourth model accounted for financial aid type (external entities, grants/scholarships), financial aid amount, how students applied for financial support, and when students became aware of financial support instead of whether a college offered financial support for study abroad. Consequently, this model was limited to colleges that offered financial aid for study abroad. This final, fourth model did not include any control variables given its smaller sample size.

# APPENDIX B: RESULTS TABLE

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Financial Support Offered	0.213 (0.284)	0.365 (0.294)	0.317 (0.302)	
SA Once/Year		-0.023 (0.213)	-0.017 (0.221)	
SA Twice/Year		0.523+ (0.297)	0.556+ (0.303)	
Internationalization Score		0.077 (0.077)	0.098 (0.080)	
Pct Pell		-0.001 (0.009)	0.000 (0.009)	
Pct Women		-0.017 (0.015)	-0.016 (0.016)	
Pct White		0.004 (0.006)	0.003 (0.007)	
Pct Under 25 Years		0.012 (0.011)	0.015 (0.012)	
Pct Part-time		-0.008 (0.006)	-0.008 (0.007)	
Pct STEM		-0.022 (0.031)	-0.026 (0.032)	
Total Enrollment		-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	
SA is New			-0.174 (0.392)	
Some SA Experience			-0.251 (0.221)	
External Entities				0.154 (0.260)
Grants & Scholarships				0.495 (0.404)
\$600 or Less				-0.508 (0.326)
Between \$600 and \$1000				-0.436 (0.343)
Separate Application				-0.078 (0.273)
Immediate Notification				0.101 (0.370)
Before Deposit				0.329 (0.337)
Different Process Each Year				0.437 (0.400)
Constant	0.387 (0.268)	0.463 (1.395)	0.282 (1.443)	0.257 (0.640)
N	56	56	55	39
R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.31	0.33	0.17

Standard errors are shown in parentheses.

+ p<.10

## ABOUT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH INITIATIVE:

The Community College International Education Research Initiative (CCIERI) is a research group organized by Dr. Melissa Whatley in William & Mary's School of Education. Our work focuses on all aspects of international education in the U.S. community college context. We are especially interested in unconventional, less common, and new approaches that promote access to international learning opportunities for underserved populations and that result in outcomes that lead to a more just world.

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