



# Virtual Global Engagement

**BLURRING THE LINES BETWEEN INCOMING  
AND OUTGOING PROGRAMS**



TERRADOTTA

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# Preface



In pre-COVID days, there was a clear line between study abroad and international student programs. Study abroad, of course, involved sending students to other countries for academic and cultural opportunities. And international programs brought students from other countries to U.S. campuses to extend their education.

But COVID has blurred every line, including our definitions of what outgoing and incoming programs actually are. With very limited travel and remote learning and virtual exchange programs growing, study abroad students are exploring other cultures from their U.S. dorm rooms and international students are continuing their U.S. education in their home countries.

These new experiences bring new opportunities to global education. With lower costs and more flexibility, virtual programs broaden global education's reach and allow for new kinds of learning that might never have been considered if a global health crisis didn't halt travel. During a **recent Terra Dotta webinar**, experts covered the opportunities of these blurred lines and how to prepare for the future.

"If we can reach students from all over the world and bring them to a space where, even if it's just one class for one semester, they can collaborate and work with students from different perspectives, I think that's invaluable," said Leiah Heckathorn, Associate Director of Bard Abroad at Bard College. "It really supplements the students' education."



**INCOMING. OUTGOING.**

**ALL THE SAME.**

**IN MARCH 2020**, global education teams' attentions quickly shifted from marketing their programs and preparing incoming and outgoing students for upcoming trips to ensuring that students were safe and in compliance with ever-changing regulations and staff was set up with the right tools and knowledge to work from home offices.

They also began searching for new ways to meet their mission of providing students with global perspectives and multicultural experiences even without travel. The results included innovative solutions that blended students across countries and cultures who may have never otherwise met. Here's how it played out at the University of Delaware and Bard College.



# UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT HOME



**IN 2020**, University of Delaware leaders fell back on their existing partnerships as they looked to develop opportunities for global learning for their students. In one case, said Ravi Ammigan, Associate Deputy Provost for International Programs at the University of Delaware, they worked with one of their institutional partners overseas to offer virtual UD courses to international students who couldn't travel to the United States. The students could make progress on their academic programs at UD even though they weren't physically on campus.

“These students are now enrolled at UD but are taking online classes from abroad in a physical classroom setting with academic resources and teaching assistants. They can choose to live on campus at our partner institution site and participate in regular campus activities and cultural events.”

—RAVI AMMIGAN  
ASSOCIATE DEPUTY PROVOST  
FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

STUDENT POPULATION

24,000

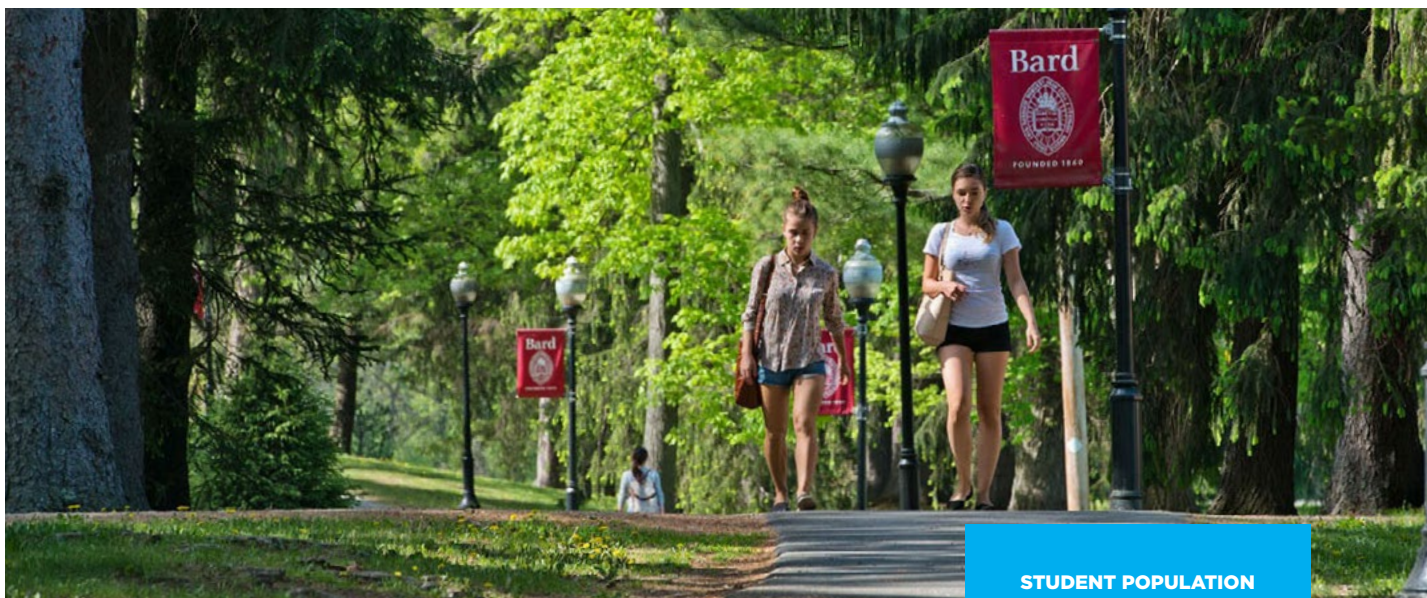
STUDY ABROAD  
PARTICIPANTS

1,455

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS,  
SCHOLARS AND DEPENDENTS

4,766

# BARD COLLEGE: BLENDING INCOMING AND OUTGOING STUDENTS VIRTUALLY



**JUST A FEW MONTHS** before the start of the pandemic, Bard College, along with Central European University and with support from the Open Society Foundation, launched an international consortium of higher education, research and cultural institutions. The **Open Society University Network**, or OSUN, aims to build a new model of global higher education, unite researchers and cultivate a new generation of globally engaged citizens, according to its mission.

While OSUN wasn't originally envisioned to offer purely virtual programs, during COVID, it became the primary way Bard has provided virtual courses to its students. Through the OSUN network, students at Bard and from around the world are taking virtual English language courses together on a wide variety of topics — from human rights and literature to economics and international relations. Classes have been held during the summer and fall 2020 and spring 2021. Heckathorn said they've fostered valuable conversations and experiences among participants.

During a chemistry class on climate change that Heckathorn helped facilitate, for example, participants shared their own personal perspectives, including conversations about flooding, monsoons, pollution and rising water levels. "As they worked in group projects together, they got new ideas and learned more about these different sites and these different peers, and it was really wonderful to see," she said.

STUDENT POPULATION

2,500

STUDY ABROAD  
PARTICIPANTS

300

J-1 AND F-1  
VISA STUDENTS

284



# TERRA DOTTA TIP

**BEFORE COVID**, Bard relied on Terra Dotta's Study Abroad platform to manage incoming and outgoing study abroad programs. During COVID, as students signed up for classes through the OSUN network, college administrators fell back on the software to create a virtual space where information could be compiled and shared. "It was something we worked with Terra Dotta on to learn more and to create a virtual space to be able to identify students and compile all their data to bring together and also share amongst the network," Heckathorn said.

## **With Terra Dotta, Bard could:**

- Take advantage of robust reporting capabilities even with a drastic increase in data.
- Access information anytime and anywhere.
- Communicate with partners, students and faculty in one system.
- Organize learning content, documents and schedules in a central location.
- Engage with students directly through Terra Dotta's student portal.



# 5 Ways to Prepare for the Future

Exactly what the future holds is uncertain for traditional study abroad and international student programs. But as we move closer to a post-pandemic world, it's clear that not everything will return to normal. Here's how to prepare for a future where it's likely the lines between incoming and outgoing students will remain blurred as new programs and possibilities emerge.



## **Continue Leveraging Partnerships**

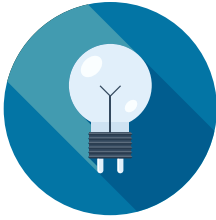
Taking advantage of your global learning network is key, but don't forget local partnerships as well to better support students, Ammigan recommended. Your local network should include student financial services, billing and scholarships, academic departments and an institution's general counsel to address complex visa issues. Global education programs also should look within their community to city leaders, local businesses and volunteers to ensure that international students have access to any available resources.



## **Take an External View of Your Processes**

Studies show, Ammigan said, that when students have a good experience, it boosts student success, retention and recruitment. At the same time, students' expectations and preferences can change. That's why it's important to take regular stock of how students experience programs. Surveys, focus groups or other in-house assessments can help underscore what is going well and where improvements can be made. "We need to assess for efficiency so we can continue to optimize our programs and services," he said.





### **Reimagine International Education From an Inclusive Lens**

As international education continues to shapeshift, leaders must ensure that new programs are developed through an inclusive and interculturally aware lens, Ammigan said. “We have to put and continue positioning students at the center of the global learning process,” he said. “But for that to happen, our efforts need to be intentional, collaborative, strategic and inclusive.”



### **Strategically Reinvest in the Student Experience**

Institutions also should prioritize investment in resources and support services to ensure programs and service delivery is effective, especially in times of crisis, Ammigan recommended. To streamline office operations, that might mean investing in new technology or online solutions. “We also need to invest in employee education, training and well-being so we can continue to support the social, academic and cultural needs of our students,” he said.



### **Actualize Your Risk Management Plan**

It’s likely time to take a step back and look at your risk management and emergency response plan to update it for lessons learned after a year of upheaval and crises. “Even if you had a pretty well articulated risk management and emergency response plan, you might be looking to rewrite it after this past year,” Ammigan said. “That’s going to be the case here at our office. There’s just so much to take into account now as we’re rethinking and adjusting for risk and emergencies.”

## NEW WAY, SAME MISSION

COVID forced global education teams to get creative. The result is a promising mix of opportunities and experiences that might look nothing like traditional study abroad and international education programs. But the goal remains the same: to build international connections and understanding.

“A face-to-face environment, in my opinion, is key for maximum intercultural engagement and exchange. But it would be a missed opportunity if we do not consider some of the practicalities, efficiencies, and increased access that come with virtual programming and enhanced information and communication technologies.

—RAVI AMMIGAN

ASSOCIATE DEPUTY PROVOST FOR  
INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS AT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE



Learn how Terra Dotta can help you manage your virtual opportunities.

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