

How to know when they're 'good to go'?

Pre-screening for international internships

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About Connect-123

- Internship & Volunteer programs
- In Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Dublin and Shanghai
- University partners + direct applicants

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What is Our Goal?

Link international students to local organizations such that both equally benefit

- Opportunity: broad goal means we can work with everyone, finding projects that fit interests, experience and skills
- Challenge: if we can work with everyone, how do we screen? On what basis do we say no?

Connect-123 Application Criteria



Subjective criteria is important,
but because it's subjective it's hard to assess...

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Screening Process

(20%) CV, motivation / reference letters

(80%) Communication: interview, emails

For Interviews:

- ask consistent questions so that interviews are structured
- take detailed notes
- if doubts, get second opinion; discuss concerns openly

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Screening Process (ctd.)

- Screening decisions are made by local staff in each location
 - increases accountability
 - staff see results of screening decisions first-hand, continually learn
 - knowledge gained informs future screening decisions



What Connect-123 has learned... so far

1. Go with your gut; communicate and share
2. Use screening radar even after program acceptance; encourage a plan B, if necessary
3. Be prepared; make sure that on-site staff are trained to help



James Madison College, MSU

- Small residential college
- 3 month internship requirement
- 12 credits, 3 for major research paper
- 30% of internships are international
- James Madison has 15 international internships programs – eg France, Germany, Spain, China, Japan, South Africa
- Co-operating with 3 other schools at MSU

MSU pre-screening Model

- Face-to-face interviews with program applicants
 - Academic eligibility (minimum of Junior status, good academic standing)
 - Seriousness of purpose
 - Maturity
 - Intellectual, professional and cultural preparedness
 - Cultural adaptability
 - Independence




MSU pre-screening model (ctd.)

- Close review of draft personal statements and resumes
 - Attention to fit between student’s academic background and requirements, internship opportunities in program location, and professional goals and aspirations
 - Clarity of purpose
 - Careful explanation of academic, work, and extra-curricular preparation for the types of preferred internships
 - Attention to what the student brings to the internship, not solely what s/he expects to gain from the internship
 - “Goldilocks” fit between clear focus and direction, and flexibility to adapt to local circumstances and opportunities

MSU prescreening model (ctd.)

- Expectations!!!!
 - Realistic understanding of standards of professionalism in internships
 - Expectation that they will be engaged in substantive, meaningful work
 - Understanding that not all substantive work is glamorous, and that menial tasks are expected of everyone
 - Understanding that professional standards have a culturally relativistic component, and that students need be ready to adapt to host culture
 - Understanding culturally-appropriate behavior
 - Work-place behavior
 - Home-life behavior (esp. when living with local families)
 - Classroom behavior (where relevant)
 - Leisure-time behavior

Same info, different conclusions

| Student has... | MSU sees... | Connect-123 sees... |
|--|---|---|
| clear, very specific idea of type of internship desired | focus, intentionality | inflexibility, rigid expectations |
| detailed questions about every aspect of internship and experience | genuine interest, thoroughness | lack of tolerance for ambiguity  |
| fluid ideas about what s/he will do for internship | 'flakiness', lack of seriousness | flexibility, adaptability  |
| Focus on location of internship, less on internship opportunities in that location | Questionable motivations, lack of academic and professional seriousness  | Cultural engagement |
| Strong, pre-existing bonds between program participants | Risk of "island" behavior, cultural isolation, group dynamics superseding formation of local relationships | Cohesive, mutually-supportive group, less dependence on local staff |

When we all see red!

- Repeated questions about information already given
- Absence of basic knowledge about host country, city
- Inability to link proposed internship to current studies and/or future career
- Vague, unfocused internship interests and goals
- More attention to identities of other participants, and proximity to tourist destinations, than to professional opportunities

Playing to our strengths: university

- University Education Abroad office's screening can be integrated with other on-campus offices
 - Dean of Students for disciplinary record / behavioral check
 - Office of Disabilities, on-campus counseling services – although disclosure is not possible, EA office can share student list so these offices can better prepare the students for the experience
- College coordinators work directly with applicants
 - closely screen for academic preparation, eligibility for internship credit, and preparation of application materials that reflect an alignment of internship interests and academic requirements
 - Make decisions on admission to program, such that applications received by provider have already been vetted and approved for participation

Playing to our strengths: service provider

- Awareness of unique challenges of particular destination
- Insight into culture and how it can affect response to certain students
- Responsibility to make an accurate assessment of the support available
- Much of this screening will impact on preparation and expectation-setting required, rather than acceptance / non-acceptance

Screening and Disability

- Cannot exclude a student with a disability
- Students are not required to disclose
- For those who disclose, make sure that accommodations are in place (prescription drugs available, on-site English-language counseling services)
- For those who do not... make sure on-site staff is trained and have emergency protocols in place!

What our screening didn't catch... MSU

- DUI offence by student meant Canadian visa was refused
- Student disclosed mental health condition and prescription medications, then went off medications during internship
- Student was approved based on a thoughtful, detailed description of internship interests, then radically changed internship interests during first week of program
- Student privately arranged with internship supervisor for significant time off during internship, without notice to provider or MSU
- Student became dissatisfied with internship, and left 2 weeks early without informing supervisor, provider, or MSU

What MSU has learned about screening from recent experience

- Accommodations can be made and processes put in place that mitigate risk and allow access to students that do disclose certain conditions
- Obligation under Americans with Disabilities Act to make “reasonable accommodations”
 - Student must be registered with campus Disability Office, and have documentation of needs and expected accommodations
 - Disability Office under some circumstances can assist financially with arranging accommodations
 - Issues come in those locations where accommodations are more challenging
 - Issues also come with predicting the kinds of accommodations necessary in a particular location, esp. if non-English language
 - Deaf students have particular challenges around ASL fluency in non-American locations – making ASL-fluent interpreters available can be a very expensive proposition

What MSU has learned about screening from recent experience (ctd.)

- Outside of disability context, clarity of expectations
 - Necessary to probe expectations (academic, professional, social, cultural, touristic) of students in some depth
 - Advising on which locations are most appropriate given those expectations
 - Helping to set reasonable expectations
 - Expectations sometimes too ambitious, other times not ambitious enough
 - Communication with providers about what constitutes “reasonable” in their context
 - Screening out students with unreasonable expectations

What MSU has learned about screening from recent experience (ctd.)

- Academic seriousness
 - Significant credit (and tuition) on the line
 - Colleges involved to ensure that the internship interests identified by the student are in alignment with the academic requirements of the credit for which they're enrolled
 - Screening of application materials thus key
 - Creates accountability mechanism when student might be tempted to go AWOL

Conclusion

- Screening is most successful when university programs and service providers align their goals and play to each of their strengths
- Thorough screening can lead to judicious recommendations regarding destination / timing, and to successful accommodations being made
- The Education Abroad community needs to share more best practices in this area!