

UIC Announces Virtual Global Internship After Canceling Spring 2021 Trips Abroad Due to COVID-19

The University of Illinois at Chicago has canceled Spring 2021 trips following CDC recommendations about COVID-19. To replace the program, a virtual global internship will be offered to UIC students this spring.

By Julia Kindelin

On October 22nd, 2020 the University of Illinois at Chicago's study abroad program decided to temporarily postpone all Spring 2021 trips until further notice due to COVID-19. The decision was made by staff under the advice of national health officials. In efforts to allow students to have intercultural experiences during COVID-19, UIC is offering a virtual international internship program hosted through Cultural Experiences Abroad (CEA) Study Abroad. The online global internship offers students opportunities to focus on professional development while enriching themselves with global experience.

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Students interested in participating in the virtual program should attend a first steps program to learn about the application process, financial aid policies, and scholarship opportunities. Those interested in applying must have a 2.75 GPA and have attended college for at least 1 year at the time of applying to be eligible for the internship. The CEA application must be submitted by November 16th, 2020 to be considered for the spring 2021 program.

"Students will be able to gain valuable international and remote work experience even while travel is suspended, as well as earn UIC credit," Krymova said.

Those accepted to the program will receive career exploration coaching and guidance before starting their internship. In addition, both domestic and international instructors will work with students to allow for a closer look into the cultures they are learning about. One of the educational focuses during classes will be about how culture impacts professional working environments.

Study abroad staff are looking forward to implementing the new virtual program next semester and are excited to see how it benefits students. The inconsistent nature of COVID-19 leaves the future of studying abroad largely unknown. In the meantime, UIC's program is looking forward to using the period of uncertainty to create new opportunities for students.

“While the global pandemic has surely disrupted international education efforts, this unique time has also caused education abroad professionals to consider what the future of study abroad might look like,” Krymova said. “We are taking this time to develop new opportunities for students to still have important intercultural experiences, such as our new virtual international internship program. Additionally, we are using this time to develop more UIC faculty-directed programs to cater to UIC students’ needs for when travel does resume.”

The study abroad office encourages students from all majors to plan for potential future trips and is hopeful that programs like theirs will help aid students for a successful future.

The office noted on their Health and Safety Study Abroad Updates webpage that the decision to postpone trips was made after consulting experts from the U.S. Department of State and The Center for Disease Control (CDC). On September 10, the CDC released a memo advising that institutions of higher education that have students planning to study abroad postpone or cancel their programs.

On March 5th, Susan Poser, Provost & Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at UIC wrote in a post on UIC Today urging UIC students to return to the United States from their trips abroad. The post also noted that UIC would not participate in any study abroad programs in CDC level 3 countries. It also said that students returning from trips should self-quarantine for 14 days and to contact their health provider if they start experiencing symptoms.

As the threat of COVID-19 grew internationally, UIC began communicating with students that were abroad about changes that were going to take place in the program. Janeil Dickens, a senior at UIC who was studying abroad during Spring 2020 recounts her experience.

“They were very direct. We received continual and thorough communications regarding the status of COVID-19 in various countries as well as travel ban updates. Information strictly related to our program was delivered to our emails and marked as urgent.”

“I signed a waiver, “ Dickens said. “But ultimately my program canceled and forced us to return home.”

Irina Krymova, Associate Director of Study Abroad acknowledges the difficulty of the decision to postpone and what steps will be taken to determine the future of the program.

“To ensure that students are able to register for UIC classes in a timely manner, UIC has made the difficult decision to suspend study abroad programming for the Spring 2021 semester,” Krymova said. “We will continue monitoring advice from these and other trusted resources, including our many partners around the world who can share the realities of the pandemic situation in their respective countries. We will only resume study abroad once experts indicate that such activity can resume with reasonable precautions in place.”

Universities across the world have been struggling to balance health and safety while maintaining a normal student experience. COVID-19 has limited travel and in most cases, people have been advised to stop all non-essential travel. While many college courses and activities can easily transition to an online format under these circumstances, study abroad programs rely on international travel to occur.

“The global nature of this pandemic has underscored the interconnectedness of our collective society and emphasizes the importance of graduates having international and intercultural experiences in order to offer creative solutions for some of the world’s most pressing issues,” Krymova said. “We invite all students to meet with us now to begin planning for an international experience once travel does resume.”

To increase awareness about study abroad programs, the study abroad office created #StudyAbroadIsForUIC. The hashtag allows students and staff to connect online as well as encourages UIC students to get involved in the program.

As of October 2020, UIC students that meet the eligibility requirements are currently able to enroll in several faculty-led programs abroad taking place in summer 2021. The program is hopeful that summer trips will occur as planned, but will postpone the trips if necessary.

To learn more about UIC’s study abroad program visit their website or email them at sau@uic.edu.