

Stats Brief

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Participation in Study Abroad Among Calvin Students

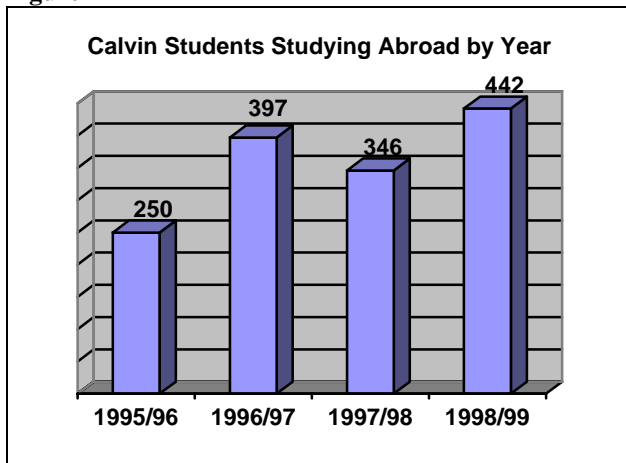
One of the goals of Calvin's Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) is to "Expand the students' and faculty's understanding of world Christianity by increasing opportunities for cross-cultural learning" (section 3.2). A key strategy for accomplishing this is to "Increase student participation in off-campus programs to the point where more than half of each year's graduates have participated" (3.2.4). Calvin is making considerable progress toward achieving and surpassing this goal, through the development of new off-campus study programs, but also in the newly revised core curriculum's requirement in cross-cultural experiences.¹

The majority of Calvin students studying off-campus study internationally, and, in recent years, Calvin has been recognized as one of the top ten colleges in our class based on the number and proportion of students studying abroad (see Open Doors 98/99 by the Institute of International Education). This report summarizes recent participation in study abroad at Calvin and utilizes the Open Doors report data for comparing Calvin with broader national trends and with some of our peer institutions.

Trends in Study Abroad

Despite some fluctuations, the general trend over the past few years shows increasing participation in study abroad at Calvin (see Figure 1). The most recent Calvin data submitted to IIE Open Doors shows a 28% increase in the number of domestic Calvin students studying abroad, from 346 in 1997/98 to 442 in 1998/99. In addition to U.S. students, another 24 Calvin students with other citizenship (mostly Canadians) studied abroad in 1998/99.² According to Open Doors, the growth trend is evident nationally as well, with the number studying abroad increasing from roughly 90,000 in 1995/96 to 114,000 in 1997/98, an increase of 27% over two years³.

Figure 1



Length and Location of Study Abroad

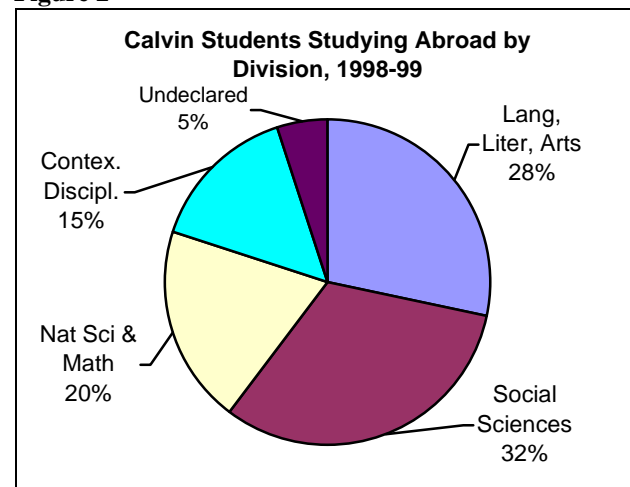
One of the unique characteristics of Calvin's academic program is its Interim—a three week intensive course in January which allows many students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to spend time abroad. A significant majority of Calvin students studying abroad in 1998/99 did so during the Interim—308 students, or 69% of the total studying abroad, while 124 students, or 28%, studied abroad for a full semester. Fourteen students (3%) participated during a summer term and a handful of students participated in both an Interim and a semester abroad. Nationally, a much higher percentage (34%) study abroad during the summer, while 38% do so for a full semester, and 10% for a full academic or calendar year.

Open Doors also provides information about the region or country in which students study. Nationwide, Europe is the most popular destination, being the destination of choice for 64% of those going abroad in 1997/98. For Calvin students, the percentage going to Europe is slightly lower, at 58%. The second most popular region among Calvin students is Latin America, with 26% of students choosing this region compared to 16% of students nationally.

Characteristics of Students Studying Abroad

The Junior Year is the most popular time for study abroad, with over one-half of undergraduates studying abroad nationally going during the Junior Year. Calvin's distribution is more balanced with about 22% of those studying abroad in 1997/98 being Seniors, 38% Juniors, 33% Sophomores, and 7% First-year students. Sixty-two percent of Calvin students studying abroad are female, compared with 65% nationally; and, in terms of major or program, Calvin students studying abroad do not differ significantly from students nationally. The distribution of Calvin students by Division is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2



Open Doors Study Abroad Rankings

Based on the most recent Open Doors report, Calvin ranks third among colleges in our class (Master’s level institutions) in the percentage of students studying abroad. To calculate its rankings, the study divides the number of U.S. students studying abroad at each institution during the academic year by the annual number receiving baccalaureate degrees at the institution. The resulting measure is a crude estimate of the percentage of graduates studying abroad, and, although it has some limitations⁴, simplifies comparisons between colleges of differing size.

According to Open Doors, approximately 43% of Calvin’s graduates study abroad. Only two colleges in our category have a higher percentage going abroad--Elon College, at 66%, and the University of Evansville, at 56%. Elon, in North Carolina (founded in 1889 as a Christian Church-UCC institution), is very similar to Calvin in size and program offerings, with about 4,000 students and a 4-1-4 academic calendar. The University of Evansville, Indiana (Methodist background) has ranked very close to Calvin in U.S. News’ Regional Universities in the Midwest category.

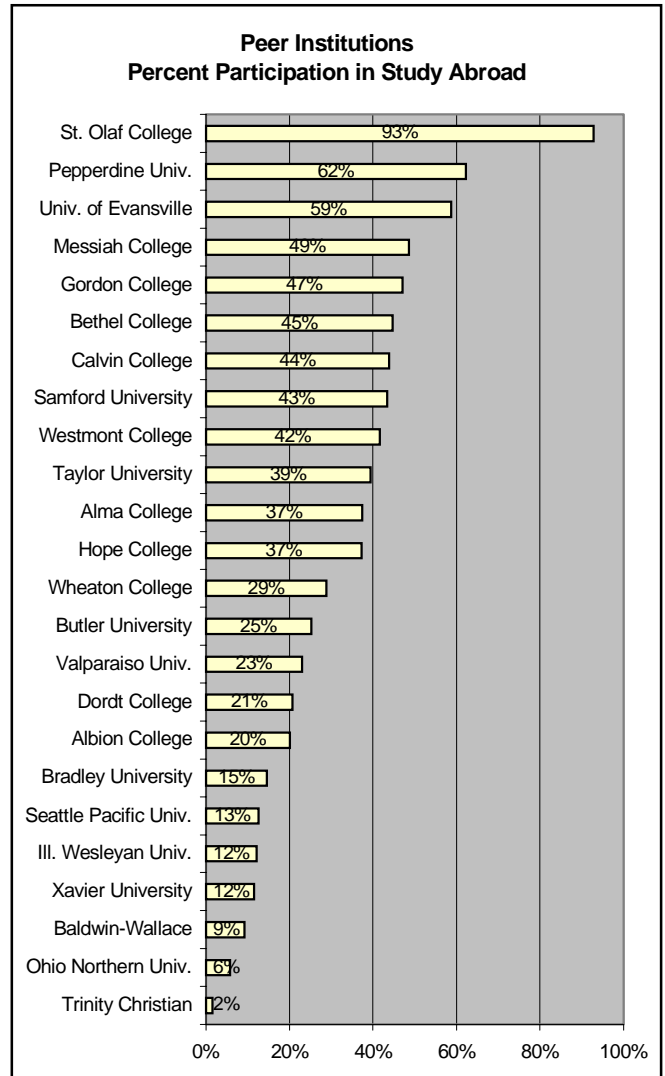
Comparing Calvin With Our Peer Institutions

While Calvin’s third place ranking here is impressive, there are many institutions with whom we are not directly compared in Open Doors. In fact, a bit of digging into the survey data reveals how Calvin ranks among a group of 24 peer institutions—schools carefully selected for comparison purposes based on geography, application overlap, similarity in mission and size, or institutional aspirations. The average percentage of graduating students going abroad among our peer institutions (not including Calvin) is 32%. Calvin, at 44%, occupies a 7th place ranking among our peers.⁵

A standout institution among our peers, Saint Olaf, sends upwards of 90% of its graduates abroad. Two other schools send more than half abroad—Pepperdine University (62%) and University of Evansville (59%), while a cluster of peer institutions have rates quite similar to Calvin, sending somewhere between 35-50% of their graduates abroad (see in Figure 3, for example,. Messiah, Bethel, Samford, Westmont, Taylor, Hope, and Alma)⁶.

While not in our list of 24 peers, neighboring Kalamazoo College ranks along with Saint Olaf as one of the top schools in the country, sending over 90% of its graduates abroad. These two schools have established themselves as leaders in the development of international study programs, but, in contrast to Calvin, they place more emphasis on the traditional Liberal Arts disciplines and correspondingly less on Professional degree programs. Such colleges have generally been able to attain higher participation rates in study abroad programs. While Calvin does an excellent job of encouraging study abroad among all students, the challenge in the near future will be finding creative ways to increase participation as we transition to the new core with its substantial requirement in cross-cultural engagement.

Figure 3



Notes

¹ Frank Roberts, Calvin’s Director of Off-Campus programs, states that Calvin has achieved its goal of 50% participation in off-campus programs. Statistics from his office show that, annually, over 10% of the undergraduate student body attend an off-campus Interim and 5% participate in a semester-long off-campus program.

² Since the IIE study only counts U.S. students studying abroad, the majority of the data in this paper will refer to U.S. students.

³ Some of the increase reported by Open Doors, however, may be due to an increase in institutions responding to their surveys in recent years (993 in 1997, 1046 in 1998, and 1090 in 1999).

⁴ This measure is valid only to the extent that the number of graduates each year remains fairly constant. Also, institutions with a high percentage of International students are penalized by this measure, since Internationals are not counted in the number studying abroad, but are counted in the number of graduates.

⁵ Thanks are due to Todd Davis, Director of Research at IIE for providing data on our peer institutions (23 completed the survey). For this report, I recalculated the study abroad participation rates using 1997 IPEDS completions data. Open Doors used 1995 data.

⁶ Excluding International students from Calvin’s graduate count results in a Calvin U.S. student participation rate of 47%.