



# **Virtual Study Abroad Keeps SIUE International Studies Students On Path Toward Global Future**

by Megan Wieser  
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EDWARDSVILLE – If you can't go there, we will bring it to you. A temporary virtual study abroad option is among the many ways Southern Illinois University Edwardsville faculty and staff have gotten creative to ensure meaningful international learning opportunities for students amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

“There are some students who can't delay their study abroad requirement without also delaying graduation plans,” said Sorin Nastasia, PhD, director of the College of Arts and Sciences' international studies program. “Helping students graduate in a timely fashion is something we should do under any circumstances, and even more so under the current pandemic situation.”

With that in mind, Nastasia partnered with SIUE advising team members to formulate a plan for students who are majoring in international studies and are slated to graduate in the summer or fall to complete their experience virtually.

“Three credit hours of joint learning will include virtual communication with experts in global settings who will address various issues that cut across the three international studies focus areas of international art, culture and communication; international politics and diplomacy; and international development and sustainability,” Nastasia explained. “For three credit hours of individualized learning, students will pursue a research project focusing on a specific country or region.”

“As part of the joint learning experience, students have already engaged in virtual discussions with experts from Russia, Kenya, India, China, France and Germany, and there are additional global immersion experiences to come,” he continued. “In the individualized learning portion, students have been working on projects pertaining to China's response to COVID-19, the activities of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and Islamic aspects in Costa Rica.”

Senior Gabrielle Wimes, of Kansas City, Mo., a double major in criminal justice and international studies, is among those students appreciative of the creative option.

“I decided to pursue international studies and criminal justice as I hope to become an international human rights lawyer and work for the United Nations,” Wimes said. “With this combination, I can not only learn about politics existent in the United States, but also gain in depth knowledge on international politics and relations worldwide.”

“Costa Rica is where I was going to travel before COVID-19 hit,” she added. “It's important for me to have the option of virtual study abroad so that I can graduate on time.”

Wimes was the recipient of the Ambassador Hussein Moussawi International Travel Scholarship. The donor family has awarded the scholarship in support of Wimes' online study abroad experience, with monies going toward tuition or to purchase electronic devices if needed.

“The connections I have built internationally for the international studies program over the past four years are now useful for tapping into the expertise of worldwide professionals,” explained Nastasia. “Ensuring communication between the students enrolled in coursework and experts in global settings will surely pose some logistical challenges, but this is an exciting endeavor with ample opportunities for student success.”

Central to SIUE's exceptional and comprehensive education, the College of Arts and Sciences offers degree programs in the natural sciences, humanities, arts, social sciences, and communications. The College touches the lives of all SIUE students helping them explore diverse ideas and experiences, while learning to think and live as fulfilled, productive members of the global community. Study abroad, service-learning, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities better prepare SIUE students not only to succeed in our region's workplaces, but also to become valuable leaders who make important contributions to our communities.