

The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act

Goal: NAFSA urges the Senate to pass and fully fund S.473, the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act of 2009.

“Senator Paul Simon had a vision—to strengthen the role of the U.S. as a world leader by investing in the education of our young people. The international study abroad program we are proposing will instill in the next generation of Americans a deeper understanding of the cultures and histories of other nations. This, in turn, will enhance the United States’ capacity to lead in the 21st Century. Last year the House of Representatives unanimously approved this bill. It is now time for the full Congress to make international education a national priority.” – Senator Dick Durbin

“It is important that our country prepare our young people for the challenges of competing in an increasingly globalized marketplace. America will be served well by taking steps to ensure our students—the future leaders of our nation—have a higher level of foreign language proficiency and international and cultural knowledge. The passage of this legislation would help us meet that important goal.” – Senator Roger Wicker

If one of our long term priorities as a nation is to have a workforce that can compete in the global economy, an investment in this program is essential. Currently, only about one percent of all college students have access to important knowledge of other cultures and languages through study abroad each year. The Simon Study Abroad Act, and the foundation it creates, will help to make quality study abroad opportunities the norm, rather than the exception, for U.S. college students of all backgrounds.

Program

The legislation establishes an innovative program to:

- Increase participation in quality study abroad programs.
- Ensure diversity in student participation in study abroad.
- Diversify locations of study abroad, particularly in developing countries.

Foundation

The bill creates a small independent government entity, the Senator Paul Simon Foundation, to administer the program through a creative and entrepreneurial grant structure. The program model will provide grants to students while at the same time leveraging institutions of higher education to address the on-campus factors that impede study abroad participation. Without this leveraging component, which requires institutions to make a commitment to address barriers to study abroad participation as a prerequisite for access to grant funds, such a dramatic increase in the number of students studying abroad each year is not achievable.

Authorization

The bill authorizes \$80 million in annual appropriations for the Foundation to carry out its mission. The Foundation will also be able to leverage funds through support from the private sector.

Status

The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act of 2009 (S. 473) was introduced on February 25, 2009 by Senators Dick Durbin and Roger Wicker. It has been referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and has already garnered significant bipartisan support. The bill is nearly identical to legislation that enjoyed strong bipartisan support and public momentum in the 110th Congress (H.R. 1469, S.991) and was one step from passage when the session ended.