Academic Information
Semester at Sea®

SAS
SINCE 1963

SEMESTER AT SEA®
**Academic Sponsor: The University of Virginia**

Semester at Sea is proud to be sponsored by the University of Virginia, one of the nation’s most prestigious institutions of higher education. Founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819, the University sustains the notion of developing leaders who are well-prepared to help shape the future of the nation. The University of Virginia is a world-class institution, fundamentally committed to international education, and a member of Universitas 21, an international network of 23 universities around the world.

**U.S. News & World Report Rankings: America’s Best Colleges**

Since U.S. News began a separate listing of the top 50 public universities, the University of Virginia consistently has been ranked as the #2 public university and has never dropped out of the top 25 listing of all national universities.

More detailed information about rankings can be found here: [http://www.virginia.edu/Facts/Glance_Rankings.html](http://www.virginia.edu/Facts/Glance_Rankings.html)

**Academic Credit**

Semester at Sea students are enrolled as visiting students of the University of Virginia (U.Va.). Grades are recorded at U.Va. and students receive official U.Va. transcripts. Courses on Semester at Sea appear as U.Va. courses, are fully accredited, and meet the generally accepted standards for transfer. The University of Virginia appoints the academic dean from among their most accomplished faculty, approves all course designs, field labs, syllabi, and faculty on Semester at Sea prior to sailing.

Each SAS voyage includes students representing **250-300 universities**. Since 1963, students from **more than 1,700 colleges and universities** have participated. SAS credit easily transfers to most schools.

**Role of The University of Virginia as the Academic Sponsor**

1. Appoint the Academic Dean
2. Approve all Faculty
3. Approve all Course Syllabi
4. Issue Credits and Transcripts
5. Acquire and Maintain Library Resources
6. Maintain Academic Standards

Prior to the voyage, syllabi undergo a comprehensive review that includes examination of course objectives, topics, field requirements, assignments, methods of evaluation, required readings and overall academic content and rigor. During the voyage, the Academic Dean and faculty set high academic standards and emphasize academic integrity but also monitor student progress and assist students in meeting these standards. - See more at: [http://www.semesteratsea.org/discover-sas/academics/uva/#sthash.UgbfpU2A.dpuf](http://www.semesteratsea.org/discover-sas/academics/uva/#sthash.UgbfpU2A.dpuf)
Global Comparative Education

Global comparative education is a form of international study that identifies and connects the world’s peoples, patterns, cultures, and traditions. Semester at Sea has served as a pioneer and leader in multiple country, comparative education for nearly 50 years.

Traditionally, study abroad has been associated with language, sociology, and anthropology curricula. A semester spent abroad is now considered a valuable degree component for disciplines as diverse as business, engineering, public health, communications, and political science. An increasing number of colleges and universities are promoting, even requiring, international study experiences for their students. At a time when global education is shifting from an optional supplement to a requirement of the undergraduate collegiate experience, the Semester at Sea study abroad experience could not be more relevant.

Academical Village Concept

As a world traveler Thomas Jefferson, founder of the University of Virginia, believed in power of new ideas. His ideal of creating a place where students and professors could live, work and socialize together has been realized in our floating campus. Semester at Sea’s living-learning community is, in many ways, a microcosm of the Jeffersonian model. The MV Explorer is the ideal academical village because it provides a platform for learning, discussion and deep connections all while traveling to new locations. Every aspect of the shipboard learning experience encourages discovery and growth. Semester at Sea cultivates an engaging and diverse learning community of undergraduates, faculty and staff, interport lecturers, international students, and lifelong learners—all of whom live and learn on a passenger ship outfitted as a globe-exploring university.

Curriculum

Courses and Field Labs: Experiential Learning

Semester at Sea offers up to 75 courses across several disciplines of study. Course syllabi reflect the expertise of the faculty member and the itinerary. For example, on voyages that travel to a specific region (such as summer voyages to the Mediterranean), you are likely to find that the “World Literature” course focuses mostly on literature from the nations visited on the itinerary, rather than the entire world.

- About 2/3 of our courses are upper-division and 1/3 are lower division.
- About 2/3 of our courses are offered on every voyage, while the remaining 1/3 of courses are unique to that voyage.

Faculty design one Field Lab, or in-country educational trip, for each of their courses. A Field Lab constitutes an additional day of class and the same expectations are placed on a lab day as placed on a class day at sea. Field Labs and their respective assignments are a required part of
each course and constitute approximately 20 percent of a student’s grade, as well as 20 percent of the course’s required contact hours.

- Students register for their courses and their field labs at the same time. In fact, the Semester at Sea online registration system will not allow a student to register in one and not the other.
- Participation in a Field Lab is limited to those students and lifelong learners enrolled in the companion course.
- The cost of required Field Labs is included in voyage tuition.

Global Lens Curriculum

The distinctive feature of Semester at Sea is the opportunity it affords students to engage in global comparative education. On each voyage, Semester at Sea offers a set of Global Comparative Lens courses that are designed to help students deepen their understanding of specific features of life and culture in the countries we visit on a given itinerary. Each course views the countries through a distinct lens—focusing on the art, music, religion, politics, environment, health, or other specific aspect of the countries we visit. These courses are designed to take maximum advantage of the opportunity to learn to think critically about their own societies and others by comparing. We ask each voyager to choose one course from among the Global Comparative Lens courses that best matches their academic interests.

Standard Course Offerings

The faculty change on every voyage, but all are of the highest caliber. Due to the fluid nature, courses change based upon faculty experience and expertise.

Some example course descriptions, field lab descriptions and syllabi can be found in the appendices and this information for each voyage can be found on our main website www.semesteratsea.org.

Port Preparation and Reflection

Beyond SAS courses, field labs, and excursions, additional programming opportunities provide a valuable international and preparatory context for the destinations on the itinerary. Semester at Sea taps resources in the U.S. State Department, hires host national lecturers and students, and fosters an environment of constant learning and exchange. - See more at: http://www.semesteratsea.org/discover-sas/academics/port-preparation/#sthash.F0iBs466.dpuf

Cultural and Logistical Pre-ports

On the evenings immediately before arrival in each port of call, the community gathers for presentations intended to enhance cultural understanding and to promote health and safety preparedness. There are often presentations by faculty, interport lecturers, medical staff, and senior administrators who have had experience in the country or region, and even relevant
Diplomatic Briefings

As part of our sustained relationship with the U.S. State Department, SAS invites diplomats and consular officials to meet with the shipboard community upon the ship’s arrival to our destinations. Officials provide shipboard participants with an in-country political briefing.

Interport Lecturers and Students

Interport lecturers are international scholars or professors living abroad who are selected for their deep knowledge of a culture, practice, or field of study. They join a segment of a voyage and participate in intercultural briefings. Interport students are undergraduates from universities around the world. They contribute to classes and give presentations about their culture.

Country Days

Routinely scheduled into each voyage are occasional days at sea without scheduled classes. On some voyages, these are set aside as a “country days,” allowing faculty and staff to plan educational experiences that focus exclusively on the next country to be visited. A variety of in-class and out-of-class presentations and activities are offered.

Explorer Seminars

Explorer Seminars are non-credit learning opportunities presented by shipboard participants each evening while at sea. The central focus of Explorer Seminar is to promote learning about upcoming ports. Other seminars feature student development topics (e.g. intercultural issues, career development, religion and spirituality, academic success, health education and promotion, student leadership, service learning, etc.).

Post Port Reflections

Post-port reflections occur the evening the ship leaves port. Participants gather in small groups, or a single large group, that is facilitated by faculty and staff and share meaningful and key learnings from their in-port experience.

Learning Outcomes

Over the past several years, three independent research initiatives have been conducted or are in progress to measure the value and learning outcomes associated with the Semester at Sea global comparative program, which traces its roots to 1963. These studies include the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI), Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE) research project, and Semester at Sea Evaluative Research: The Alumni Survey. A few of the recent findings are summarized below.
The Global Perspective Inventory (GPI)

The Global Perspective Inventory is a quantitative scale developed by educators Larry Braskamp, David Braskamp, Kelly Carter Merrill, and Mark Engberg to measure how college students’ global perspectives evolve when exposed to international study abroad experiences. Semester at Sea is one of 76 universities and study abroad providers that use the GPI (see a list of participating institutions on the GPI website).

The GPI features a 64-item survey that is administered prior to an international study abroad experience (pretest) and after being exposed to cultures that differ from the students’ (posttest). The instrument is comprised of three subscales that assess change across cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. The cognitive dimension addresses the question “How do I know?” and reflects increased complexity in thinking (i.e. moving from absolute certainty to a relativist perspective). The intrapersonal dimension addresses the question “Who am I?” and reflects the process of becoming more aware of one’s personal identity and values. The interpersonal dimension addresses the question “How do I relate to others?” and reflects an individual’s ability to accept and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Participants enrolled in Semester at Sea during the Summer 2009, Fall 2009, and Spring 2010 voyages were asked to complete the GPI online while aboard the ship. The GPI was administered to participants prior to reaching the first country of the respective voyage and then again after departing from the final country of the voyage. Scores on the GPI generally increased from pre to posttest on almost every subscale across all voyages.

Source: AIEA Annual Conference 2011, Larry Braskamp

- **Cognitive knowledge**: Participants reported an increased understanding and awareness of various cultures, their impact on our global society and an increased proficiency in
languages. This was significant for all three voyages yielding the highest gains of all assessed dimensions.

- **Intrapersonal identity**: Participants reported an increased awareness regarding their unique identity, purpose in life, and meaningful philosophy of life. This was significant for two of the three voyages, with the last voyage coming very close to significance.
- Participants reported an **increase in viewing themselves as global citizens**. This was significant for two of the three voyages.
- Participants reported an **increase in overall wellbeing**. This was significant for two of the three voyages.
- **Intrapersonal affect**: Participants reported increased respect and acceptance of cultural perspectives that were different from their own as well as a higher degree of emotional confidence when processing encounters with other cultures. This was significant for two of the three voyages.

### The SAGE Research Project

Initiated in 2006, the Beyond Immediate Impact: Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE) research project seeks to examine the long-term personal, professional, and global engagement outcomes associated with study abroad experiences that occur during the college years. **Global engagement**, as conceptualized by SAGE, is the contributions a person makes to the common good by means of civic engagement, knowledge production, social entrepreneurship, and philanthropy.

SAGE is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and developed by co-principal investigators Gerald W. Fry and R. Michael Paige. The report draws on 6,000 study abroad participants from 22 U.S. colleges, universities, and education abroad providers nationwide, including the Semester at Sea program.

The final project report has not yet been released but preliminary findings presented at the 2008 annual conference of NAFSA: Association of International Educators indicate that Semester at Sea participants were strongly impacted by their education abroad experience.
Semester at Sea Evaluative Research

This independent research project was conducted by social scientist Robert C. Weigl, Ph.D., director of the Franklin Center in Alexandria, Va. with Carol Baker, Ph.D., former director of the Office of Measurement and Evaluation at the University of Pittsburgh. The 2009 report summarizes findings from an online survey of 342 Semester at Sea alumni who sailed between 1980 and 2008.

Survey Results

- 55% report the program had a “huge” impact on their lives, 36% say the program had a great deal of impact. Total yield results 90% very substantially influenced.
- 85% report the program had a great deal more impact on their lives than any semester on their home campus; add 12% who report “somewhat more” impact at sea than at home, and a total 97% report Semester at Sea as their most important college semester.
- 73% report the Semester at Sea influence on their lives has not diminished with time; 38% report that the impact has continued to grow over time since their voyage. Thus, nearly 40% of alumni experienced a program “sleeper effect.”
- 42% report they have been sojourners overseas—spending extended time living and studying in other countries.
- 22% report they work or have worked outside the United States.
- 39% report they have traveled to revisit and learn more about countries they visited on their SAS voyage. - See more at: http://www.semesteratsea.org/discover-sas/academics/outcomes/#sthash.K74aittX.dpuf

(Information Consolidated from www.semesteratsea.org 2013)