



# Penn Abroad



# 2020-2021

## ANNUAL REPORT



# A Challenging Year

Benjamin Franklin once said that there are “no gains without pains.” The 2020-2021 academic year has provided a measure of both as Penn Abroad continued to offer support and outreach to students, faculty, and the campus community and ensured that global opportunities remained a priority through a time that we could so easily have retreated. Commencing the year from a fully remote campus, we soon realized that the pains of the pandemic could actually enable gains in conversation, strategic thinking, and exciting new avenues to achieve our global objectives.

The ability for the Penn Abroad team to pivot to virtual programming in both the internship and faculty-led areas guaranteed that the commitment to global engagement remained a cornerstone of Penn’s mission. In fact, the challenges of this year have allowed us to cultivate new opportunities while simultaneously ensuring that our existing programs were ready for students as soon as travel restrictions were lifted. From the numerous Collaborative Online International Learning courses executed in fall 2020 and spring 2021 to the formalization of the Virtual Internships Abroad program in summer 2021, global programming options continued for Penn students even without travel. Through these experiences, we have gained significant insights about the future of virtual programming, and we hope to leverage them to increase access to dynamic and meaningful experiences for students.

As we look forward to resuming semester inbound and outbound programs this fall, Penn Global Seminars courses over winter break, and in-person internships next summer, Penn’s resilience and that of our students will ensure global engagement remains part of the core fabric of a Penn undergraduate degree. The next academic year looks even brighter as we develop exciting new programming, including Penn’s China Education Initiative, Penn Global Research Institutes, and a new inbound scholarship program offered in partnership with the Sawiris Foundation. As the chapter closes on a truly extraordinary year, I am proud to say that students will have access to an even greater number of global opportunities at Penn than they ever have before.

**Nigel Cossar**  
Director

*“The ability for the Penn Abroad team to pivot to virtual programming in both the internship and faculty-led areas guaranteed that the commitment to global engagement remained a cornerstone of Penn’s mission.”*

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# VIRTUAL OPPORTUNITIES

After the first shockwaves of the pandemic subsided, Penn Abroad began looking for ways to fulfill the mission of providing a meaningful global experience to every Penn student in an environment in which international travel was nearly impossible. These initial forays into the unknown resulted in a dynamic and robust new portfolio of virtual programming and outreach that expanded access to underrepresented students, lowered program costs, reduced carbon emissions, and challenged the notion that a global experience requires physical travel.

## PGS-COIL

Like every program in the Penn Abroad portfolio, **Penn Global Seminars (PGS)** was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020-2021 academic year. However, PGS was able to continue operations under a new modality known as **Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)**. Under the PGS-COIL model, 10 faculty leaders embedded virtual exchange elements into their course which allowed their students to participate in collaborative work with individuals, classes, and organizations abroad throughout the semester. Student participants did not need to apply to the program or pay a program fee to participate, rendering the PGS-COIL program one of the most accessible in Penn Abroad's portfolio.

Not only did 96% of student participants report that they had a meaningful global experience in the program, but PGS-COIL also provided a means to remain engaged with many PGS faculty and overseas partners in a productive, equitable, and thoughtful way. For example, in *People of the Land: Indigeneity and Politics in Argentina and Chile*, Dr. Tulia Falletti of the Political Science department created an ambitious project for her students: a documentary exploring Mapuche culture, recuperation of identity and language, territorial claims and arrangements, and different models of economic and environmental sustainability. Students were able to interview members of seven separate Mapuche communities and utilized this footage in the final documentary.

**90** students participated in **7** PGS-COIL courses

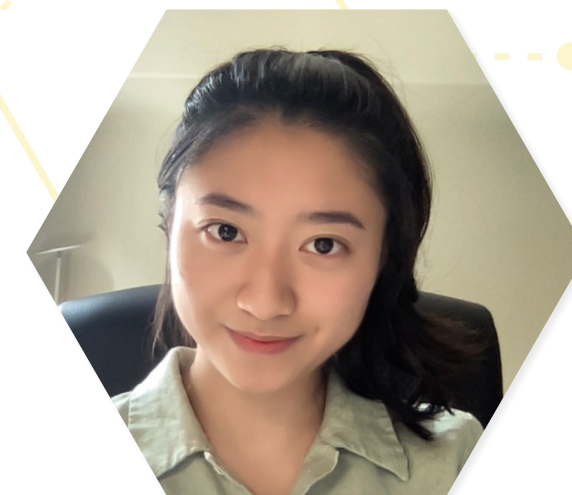
*Dr. Aurora MacRae-Crerar's PGS-COIL students participated in regular bonding activities, breakout groups, and active discussions over Zoom.*



*"I truly appreciate the platform the GRIP program has offered me to communicate and engage with those who share similar passions as me from the other side of the world.*

*Despite being remote, this internship has brought me a rewarding experience in this unusual summer!"*

Nina (Yichen) Wei,  
GRIP Summer Reporting Intern



## Internships & Research Abroad

After successfully completing a virtual internships program pilot in summer 2020, Penn Abroad established the **Virtual Internship Abroad (VIA)** program in summer 2021 with the goal of offering fully funded virtual summer internships to undergraduate students moving forward. The program is customizable and flexible in nature, allowing students to choose their internship duration and to choose either part-time or full-time work hours. Students are matched with a host organization around the world in a wide variety of industries, including business, engineering, law, tourism, fashion, graphic design, sustainability, and healthcare. Interns also engage in cultural programming throughout the summer, such as language learning and cross-culture networking events.

In response to the ongoing pandemic and the University's continued travel suspension, the **Global Research & Internship Program (GRIP)** moved to an online format for summer 2021. Due to the uncertain prospect for travel, the GRIP team worked with employers and partners to develop remote work contingency plans well in advance of the summer, so the pivot to virtual delivery offered a rewarding experience for both students and employers. The majority of students interning or conducting research virtually through VIA and GRIP reported having a meaning global experience in the programs, with highlights including intercultural engagement, language learning, and rich professional networking opportunities.

**281** Students engaged in remote internship and research opportunities with **111** GRIP participants and **170** VIA participants.



Participants worked with organizations in **33** countries.



**61%** of students received financial aid



**27%** of students identified as a first-generation college student



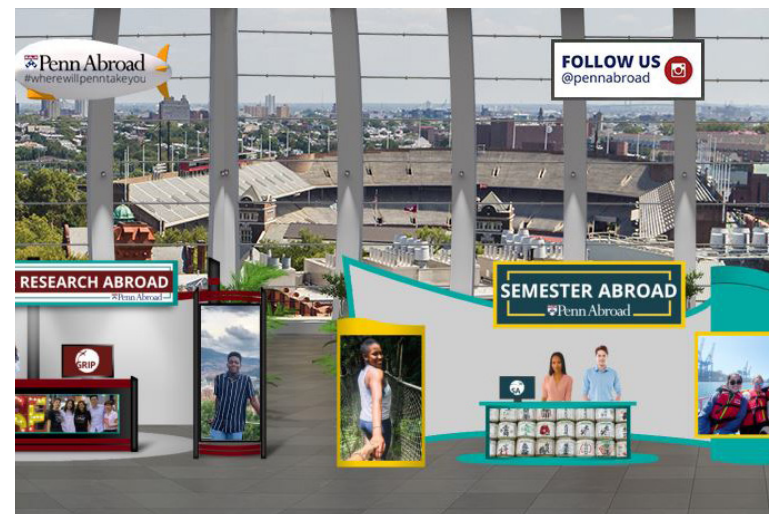
*“Hear from people that have lived and thought differently than you. Talk with them. Travel. Take full advantage of the wealth of resources because it is only four years, and it is going to be up before you know it...Let yourself be changed by the vast, beautiful differences in the world.”*

Catherine Parr, Penn Abroad Leader,  
on the Penn Abroad Blog

## Outreach & Student Engagement

Just as Penn Abroad’s flagship programs were forced to adapt to the limitations presented by the pandemic, so too did its outreach efforts. The **Penn Abroad Fair** is the office’s largest annual event, allowing students to explore the myriad global opportunities available to them at Penn. To keep that momentum alive, Penn Abroad hosted a **virtual fair** in September 2020 using a dynamic online platform that gave it the look and feel of an in-person event. Students could browse country- and program-specific booths, chat with program managers, academic advisors, and international partners, and attend live info sessions in the virtual auditorium. In total, 36 international partners and 10 campus partners exhibited at the fair using customizable and interactive booths. During Penn Global Week 2021, Penn Global leveraged the same virtual platform to host its first-ever **Penn Global Opportunities Fair** which featured the many exciting international initiatives, student support services, and global opportunities that make up life at Penn.

In lieu of in-person information sessions on campus, Penn Abroad staff were able to connect with students through virtual **Penn Abroad 101 (PA101)** sessions and a new **PA101 On-Demand** video accessible from any time zone in any location. PA101 provides comprehensive information on Penn Abroad’s global opportunities, including the benefits of going abroad, academics, financial considerations, the application process, and next steps. **Penn Abroad Ambassadors** and **Penn Abroad Leaders (PALS)** remained a key feature in Penn Abroad’s outreach strategy, joining PA101s and other events to share insights and experiences from their time abroad. The 4<sup>th</sup> year of the PALS program operated magnificently despite being fully remote, with members contributing posts to the **Penn Abroad blog**, completing a major project focusing on campus-wide credit transfer resources, and hosting coffee chats with fellow students interested in studying abroad.



The online exhibit hall of the Penn Abroad Virtual Fair in fall 2020.

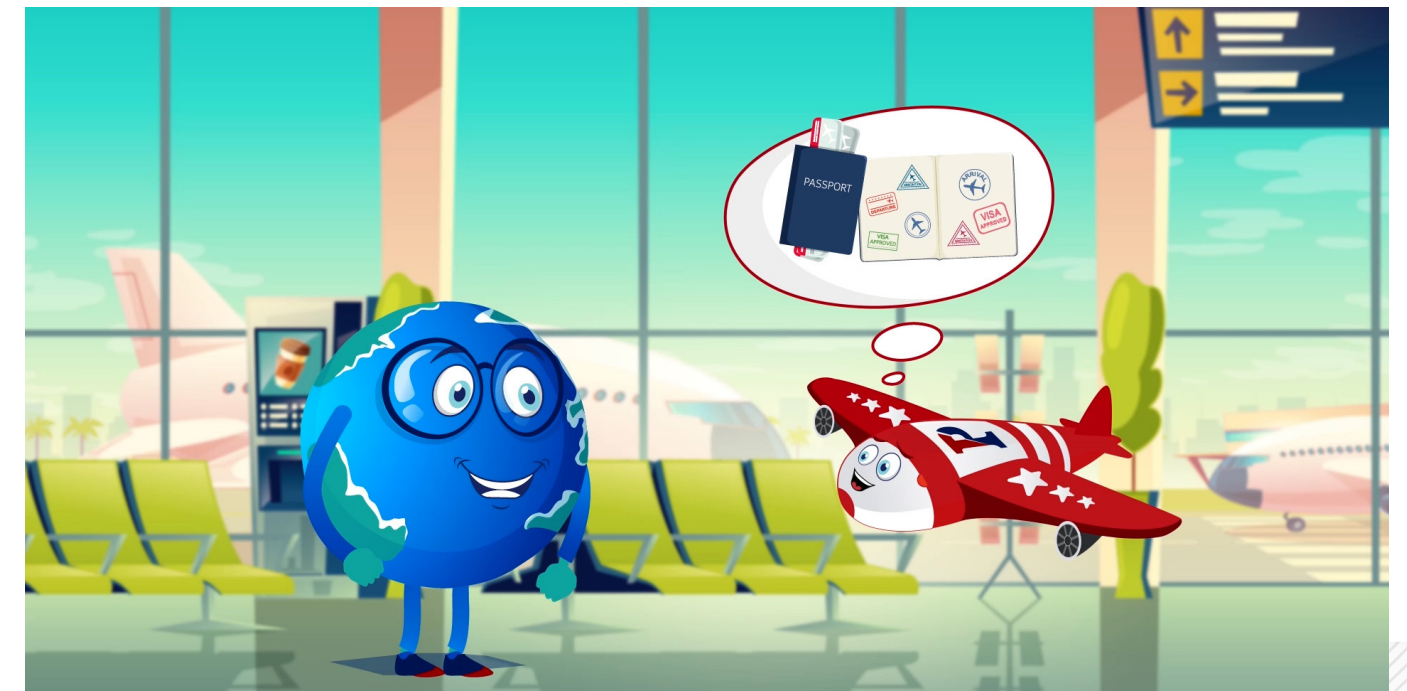
# ENHANCED PROCESSES & RESOURCES

In addition to enhancing its programmatic offerings, Penn Abroad improved many of its internal processes and external resources this year. Penn Abroad’s **[Diversity and Identity webpage](#)** expanded to provide additional guidance to students from a variety of backgrounds as they consider their options and prepare for their global program. The **[Families page](#)** was refreshed with a new focus on addressing frequently asked questions and helping parents, guardians, and relatives empower their students to pursue international education experiences.

Penn Abroad’s **PASSPORT application system** also underwent numerous front- and back-end changes, including a new look for its landing page and login screen, as well as a more streamlined student application experience. These changes gave PASSPORT a sleek and functional overhaul that is mobile-friendly and engaging to the user.

The Penn Abroad team worked collaboratively to develop a set of internal **Team Values** designed to maintain a healthy team culture, improve day-to-day operations, and inform the hiring and onboarding process. These values include teamwork, kindness and respect, honesty, flexibility, dedication to diversity, and the power to lead by example.

Finally, Penn Abroad completed a full review and overall enhancement of the **online pre-departure orientation modules**. To make the content memorable and dynamic, Penn Abroad created animated videos featuring entertaining characters and Penn imagery to convey essential information as students prepare for their global experiences.



In the second module of Penn Abroad’s animated pre-departure orientation, characters Whit (left) and Sam (right) discuss important travel preparations, such as passports and visas.

# FUTURE PLANNING

After the suspension of **Semester Abroad (SA)** programming through the 2020-21 academic year, Penn Abroad and students alike are excited to resume SA travel in the coming year. In fall 2021, Penn Abroad will run a condensed portfolio with a total of 46 students expected to travel abroad. Penn Abroad selected these programs in close collaboration with Penn's Committee on Travel Risk Assessment (CTRA) and partners abroad based on the following criteria:

- Careful assessment of health and safety factors and risk in each location, including host country COVID statistics and entry requirements.
- Prioritization of partners that offer credit for multiple undergraduate schools.
- Prioritization of immersive language programs for students who require it for their academic curriculum.
- A focus on trusted partners with excellent crisis management procedures and responsive university communications.
- Access to 24/7 support from either an on-site resident director or through virtual support staff.

Penn Abroad hopes to run an expanded suite of SA programs to many more locations worldwide in spring 2022, and will continue to monitor the situation to select the most promising locations and partners.

**Exchange at Penn (EAP)** intends to resume normal operations during the 2021-22 academic year and will welcome more than 200 students to Penn during the fall and spring semesters.

**Penn Global Seminars (PGS)** will resume travel in the fall 2021 semester and is continuing efforts to expand opportunities in regions underrepresented in education abroad with feature program sites in Ecuador, India, Mongolia, and Jamaica. In response to faculty and student feedback, the portfolio will, for the first time since the program's inception, include upper-level, major-specific courses. The **Global Research & Internship Program (GRIP)** also intends to resume travel in summer 2022, in addition to Penn Abroad's plans to increase research opportunities in new and existing programs.

Penn Abroad's development of new virtual internships and the **PGS-COIL** pilot were an unmitigated success, generating positive feedback from both students, faculty, and employers. These programs, which were so critical to ensuring that the University continued to bring the world to Penn and Penn to the world during the pandemic, are here to stay. Penn Abroad will continue exploring ways to offer highly flexible global experiences and expanding access for students who may face barriers to traditional programs abroad.

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