

**Development of a Study Abroad Experience for First-Generation and Underrepresented
College Students**

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Background:

The Miramontes Arts & Sciences Program (MASP) is an inclusive academic community for highly motivated students in the College of Arts & Sciences dedicated to pursuing academic excellence at CU Boulder. MASP aims to support the lived and individual experiences and achievements of first-generation college students and members of historically underrepresented communities. The mission of the program is to provide a supportive environment for students with an emphasis on matriculation, retention, and post-graduate success. MASP is part of the CU Lead Alliance – a set of academic learning communities dedicated to inclusivity and student success. Each college/school at CU Boulder has a Lead Alliance program (e.g., the BOLD Center in the College of Engineering and the Diverse Scholars Program in the Leeds School of Business). Additionally, there are multiple campuswide Lead Alliance programs, such as Multicultural Leadership Scholars and the McNeill Academic Program.

MASP currently serves approximately 225 students, with each student entering the program through a cohorted experience. There is a three-week summer bridge program (PEAC) for incoming first-year students, a winter weekend retreat for continuing students (LINC), and a first-year division-focused bridge program (the Bound programs). Students entering MASP through PEAC or LINC participate in MASP through graduation; students in the Bound programs participate MASP during their first year only.

MASP has three full-time teaching faculty who also serve as faculty mentors for students majoring in each faculty member's respective division of expertise (i.e., arts and humanities, natural sciences, or social sciences). Students are expected to meet regularly with their faculty mentor for academic planning and guidance. While participating in MASP, students are required

to take a specified number of one-credit seminars depending on when and how they entered the program (the typical number of required seminars is four). MASP students are also expected to participate in “high impact practices”, such as study abroad, research, internships, or a capstone project. Given the nature of teaching and learning in MASP, the guiding question behind this project is: how can we draw upon these existing expectations to create a new learning experience for students?

Project Goals:

The overarching goal of this project was to begin developing a study abroad “Global Intensive” course for MASP students. A Global Intensive is an on-campus course with an international component taking place during fall break, spring break, or in May after the end of the spring semester. Multiple CU Lead Alliance programs lead Global Intensives for their students and CU Education Abroad is interested in more Lead Alliance programs doing so through their Global Access Initiative. Education Abroad’s Global Access Initiative can provide students with funding that will cover nearly all their study abroad expenses. Existing Lead Alliance Global Intensives include Multicultural Leadership Scholars (MLS) taking students to Barcelona in May and Student Academic Success Center (SASC) programs (e.g., McNeill and TRiO) taking students to the Dominican Republic over spring break.

This project was designed to respond to several challenges or unmet needs for MASP and its students. Many traditionally underrepresented and first-generation students are unable to study abroad or believe such an opportunity isn’t possible for them. Developing a Global Intensive course for MASP students in tandem with Education Abroad funding will give students this opportunity.

As mentioned earlier, all students enter MASP through a cohorted experience. Prioritizing this study abroad opportunity for upperclassmen as they approach graduation will give them a communal experience that mirrors their experience entering MASP. This is especially important in terms of the engagement and participation of junior and senior students in MASP. This study abroad experience could help to cultivate a renewed sense of community for these students. There is often early enthusiasm for MASP participation, but it typically drops off as students enter their third and fourth years and cohorts of students begin to disperse. There is also a need to better integrate students from different entry points (i.e., PEAC and LINC) and cohorts into a broader MASP community. Having a study abroad experience that students are working toward could help keep them engaged and active in the program (especially if program participation is a factor in deciding which students are chosen to participate in this experience).

At the individual and program level, additional goals of this project include: (1) collaborating with MASP faculty, staff, and students to identify goals and expectations for the Global Intensive course, (2) engaging with colleagues in the CU Lead Alliance and Education Abroad to develop course curriculum and work on logistics, (3) understanding how to incorporate inclusive pedagogy and community building into an experiential learning course, and (4) identifying best practices in experiential learning and development of a study abroad curriculum. At a broader campus level, additional goals of this project include: (1) imagining ways to make study abroad experiences more accessible to more students at CU Boulder and (2) contributing to ongoing campus discussions about inclusive pedagogy and active learning inside and outside the traditional classroom setting.

Project and Outcomes:

This project started out primarily as an exploration of the feasibility of developing a study abroad experience. The original intention was not necessarily to have a full course developed by the end of the spring 2025 semester, but rather to have a clear path forward for implementing this course as early as spring 2026. By the end of spring 2025, I hoped to have established a relationship with Education Abroad to begin planning the logistics of a Global Intensive, including identifying a location and developing a budget. In addition, I intended to have at least an outline of a course syllabus developed.

What began as a dream project for MASP has quickly turned into a real study abroad experience that MASP students will be able to participate in starting in spring 2026. This began when CU Boulder's Education Abroad office approached the MASP team in late fall 2024 to discuss the possibility of expanding their Global Access initiative to more CU Lead Alliance programs, including MASP. In meeting with Education Abroad director Sylvie Burnet-Jones and associate director Steve Rose, MASP was offered the opportunity to design our own Global Intensive with funding generously provided by Education Abroad and study abroad provider CIEE for the next three years (spring 2026 through spring 2028). All MASP had to do was decide on a location from a list of about 40 CIEE study abroad sites around the world. Once a location was chosen, we would work collaboratively with Education Abroad and CIEE to decide on an itinerary and design a budget.

While participating in the Global Access initiative was an amazing opportunity for MASP and our students, we were left with several questions to figure out. Beyond deciding where we were taking students to study abroad, who was going to teach this new course and be the faculty advisor for the study abroad component? Will we rotate the faculty advisor role

across all three years? If so, how do we design a class that any MASP faculty member can teach? Furthermore, how do we design a class that fits the pedagogical goals of MASP courses? What are the best practices for effective study abroad courses? If many students want to participate in the class, what selection criteria do we use to choose students?

Throughout the spring 2025 semester, my colleagues and I met with other instructors and faculty advisors for other Global Access programs to learn more about their approach to course design and studying abroad. We met with Laura Moore (leading the MLS Global Intensive to Barcelona) and Shane Oshetski and Loren Intolubbe-Chmil (leading the SASC Global Intensive to the Dominican Republic). Collectively, they provided great insight into the benefits and challenges of designing and carrying out a Global Intensive course. With both programs being at different stages of development (the MLS course is being taught for the first time in spring 2025 and the SASC course has been taught for nearly a decade), we were able to learn more about their respective thought processes in developing their courses and get advice on the practicalities of taking students abroad.

Given three years of funding and three MASP faculty members, we decided to rotate the faculty advisor role among all of us, with me taking the first group of students in spring 2026. In deciding on a study abroad location, we quickly narrowed our choices to somewhere in Latin America. For a short study abroad experience of only ten to twelve days, the travel time required to get to locations in Asia and Oceania wasn't feasible and Europe is such a common study abroad destination for most students. Given we have many Spanish-speaking students in MASP, a Latin American destination made sense, and we settled on Buenos Aires, Argentina.

With a destination in mind, we needed to decide on a topic for the course. In doing so, we thought back to our established goals of all MASP courses – specifically, our goals of advancing

awareness of, and action on, issues of social equity and extending critical thinking and analysis skills in multiple disciplines. With social justice in its many forms being a key theme of many MASP courses, we began thinking about a course on social justice in Latin America. Using Argentina as a case study, this course will compare social justice movements between the United States and Latin America. Given MASP faculty's respective interests in the arts and humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences, we hope to be able to tailor this broad theme to match our expertise without needing to fully redesign a new course each year as different faculty teach it.

As part of this project, I was also interested in MASP student input on course design. Using the professional development funds provided by the Faculty Fellows program, I hired a MASP student to be a student assistant to help with this portion of the project. I chose junior Piper Tocco who is earning bachelor's degrees in Middle and High School Teaching and Humanities. Piper was an excellent thought partner for this project. She began by developing an annotated bibliography on sources related to inclusive pedagogy, experiential learning, study abroad coursework, and social justice movements in the United States and Latin America. Piper also created a detailed course calendar with readings and assignment ideas. The course is currently designed in three sections. Starting with a focus on social justice movements in the United States (both historical and contemporary), we then introduce social justice movements in Latin America before narrowing down to Argentina as a case study. With the class traveling to Argentina after the end of the spring semester, this allows students to learn more context about the country before being able to see what forms social justice takes on the ground in Buenos Aires.

At the end of the spring 2025 semester, I feel in a good position to teach this course and lead students abroad next spring. With a course outline and draft itinerary prepared, the class

already has a strong foundation. As we move through the summer and into the fall semester, an important next step will be developing a recruitment and selection process for student participants. The budget limits us to 14 students per year that can study abroad, and we expect there to be high demand for these limited spots. Therefore, this should be a competitive process and we'll need to make sure that the selection of students is as equitable as possible.

Reflection:

Participating in the Faculty Fellows program was a great opportunity to give me the time, space, and resources to work on this project. The professional development funding allowed me to hire a student collaborator to help make significantly more progress than I could have made on my own. Creating a new course is a significant task and developing a study abroad experience for somebody who hasn't taken students abroad before is certainly daunting. However, with the support of my MASP colleagues, the Faculty Fellows program, partners in Education Abroad, CIEE, and the CU Lead Alliance, and my undergraduate assistant, the development of this course was actually manageable. The support of all these collaborators has made this project possible and I'm very fortunate to have them as partners.

It was a pleasure to meet and work with a cohort of other faculty from a variety of disciplinary and personal backgrounds across campus. They all brought useful experience and expertise to our cohort meetings. I appreciated their insights about the teaching and learning challenges they experienced, but, more importantly, I was inspired by the creative solutions they proposed. Their feedback on my project proposal was valuable and they pushed my thinking in new directions. I am more optimistic about the state of undergraduate education on this campus after working with this cohort – each one is deeply invested in student success, actively engaged

with their students, and interested in the pursuit of improving their pedagogical practices, not just for themselves, but for their respective departments and programs.