

# International Health and the PLME

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are many different routes to finding an international experience or developing an international component of your career. Like a roadmap, this resource is intended to assist Brown PLME students as they choose from the many possible ways to achieve this during the undergraduate and/or medical school years, either for language study, individual projects, electives, or as part of an overall plan to pursue a career in international health. It is not meant to be the definitive source of information on the large, ever changing, and ever expanding international opportunities that are available, but as a guide to some of the many valuable sources of information that you may find helpful. Many of these are at Brown and are easily accessible by personal visit or via the university website. Others outside of Brown can be found on the Internet or through other research.

As you develop your interests and plans, keep the following key points in mind:

- **Plan ahead.** There are many opportunities for studying and working abroad and numerous possible sources of funding, but most require considerable advance planning.
- **Clarify your interests.** Talk with as many fellow students and faculty as possible...“cast a wide net”. Ask yourself WHY you wish to study, work or experience culture abroad.

- **Find mentors.** As you clarify your interests and goals, identify and work with one or more Brown mentors to further develop your ideas and move forward. Eventually, also identify a mentor at the international site who can provide logistical and other assistance. Always start with your PLME advising dean.
- **Think longitudinally.** Build on each new experience or skill. For PLME students there are potentially 72 weeks (!) during the 8-year program (5 summers; 4 January breaks) which can be used for international experiences. In addition, it is possible to take one or more semesters abroad, take one or more years off from the PLME, as well as use elective time in the 3rd or 4th medical school years to work abroad.
- **Talk to people.** The Internet can be an invaluable source of information, ideas, and contacts, but there are many students and faculty throughout Brown University and elsewhere with interests, experience, and ongoing involvement in international work. Seek these people out and ask for additional leads and introductions for achieving your particular goal.
- **Be flexible.** Your first goal may be to pursue a particular interest in a particular country, but you may find the people and resources to support an experience somewhat different from your original plan. Consider such alternatives.
- **Look in unusual places.** The Office of International Programs, for example, does more than just help arrange junior semesters abroad; the staff can help you find short intensive language programs or point you to sources of information for summer jobs or research. Brown University Career Services supports seniors who are looking for jobs after graduation, but can help you find summer jobs and direct you to valuable databases.
- **Develop your foreign language skills.** It is impossible to overestimate how valuable knowing one or more foreign languages will add to the effectiveness and enjoyment of your work. To be a serious competitor for many international career positions you will need language skills beyond English. It is therefore imperative that you clarify your goals as the level of language skill needed varies by what you are hoping to achieve abroad.
- **Develop your knowledge of a particular geographic area or discipline.** Use some of your time at Brown to become an expert in the country or region of your interest – politics, culture, history, religion, etc. Learn about the particular health issues of that area.
- **Above all,** be an outstanding student and become an outstanding physician. Any field of medicine can be valuable in international work. Most important is that you are excellent at what you do.

## **2. GETTING STARTED**

### ***QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO CONSIDER***

As you develop your international interests, consider the following questions, which will be frequently asked of you:

- Why do you want to go abroad?
- What are your general goals and specific objectives?
- Do you have previous international experience? Do you want to build on this?
- Where do you do you want to go?
- Do you have a preference for country or region of the world?
- Do you have or seek to develop competency in one or more foreign languages?
- When do you plan to go abroad? (summer; January break; semester abroad; year off; medical school (3rd/4th year)
- Have you explored the options for meeting your current needs in the U.S. (basic language study; working in the U.S. office of an international non-governmental organization (NGO); working with immigrant populations in your community, etc.)?
- Do you have specific skills, which may be valuable abroad, such as teaching, research, or management experience?
- Are you looking for an educational opportunity, i.e. a formal course? With or without credit?
- Are you looking for a paid or volunteer position? (remember, if you wish to do meaningful medical volunteer work, your skills will improve as you move forward into your medical school years-you can truly take care of patients after year 3 of medical school)
- If you volunteer how will you pay for your expenses?
- Are you looking for a research, teaching, or service opportunity? - Do you plan or expect to have time to travel on your own before or after the primary experience?
- What comfort level are you seeking? What sort of setting are you interested in/willing to work in?
- Do you want to go to a developing or developed country?
- Is this a short-term experience only or part of a long-term interest?
- How does this relate to your current academic interests and/or your long-term career aspirations?
- Are you looking for an 'international health' experience? What do you mean?
- Have you considered participating in a public health project (water; sanitation; nutrition; environment; public policy; etc.) rather than a 'medical' project? What contacts do you have in the geographical or academic/professional field of your interest?
- Do you have a mentor or potential mentor at Brown for your international work?
- Do you plan to link your international work with a subsequent senior thesis (such as in Community Health) or other Brown project? Have you met with the appropriate faculty to define your topic and do preliminary research before you travel?

### 3. CONSIDER THESE RESOURCES:

Brown students whether PLME undergraduates or medical students, should start by reviewing this guide then consulting with their advising dean. Advisors have access to the material referenced here and can help students devise an efficient approach to gathering information and formulating a successful plan. The next steps should include visits to the offices and websites of the following key resources at the university:

- *Bulletin of the University* and annual *Courses@Brown* website

Identify faculty and courses, which may be of interest to you. Dozens of faculty have international interests and ongoing global research projects.

<http://careerdevelopment.brown.edu/resources/international.php>

Visit the international section of the resource library and speak with staff about available services.

Read the *Pulse* newsletter regularly for announcements of speakers, programs, and grants. Visit your advisors early and often!

- *Office of International Programs* (OIP) – Page Robinson Building 4th floor

<https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/special-programs/international-study/>

Visit the large library regarding international study and work. The staff can give you an introduction to the library, and advisers are available for individual student meetings.

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<https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/swearer/>

The student staff can advise you regarding GISPs (Group Independent Study Projects), ISPs (Independent Study Projects), academic internships, and leave taking programs. The center conducts regular “Brown Around the World” forums in which members of the Brown community share their experiences living, studying, working, or traveling abroad.

- *Swearer Center* 2 Stimson Ave

<https://watson.brown.edu/>

Become acquainted early with the fellowships and advising which the Center offers.

Fellowships have regular application deadlines that are listed on the website.

- *Watson Institute for International Studies* – 111 Thayer Street

<https://watson.brown.edu/opportunities> Review the Institute’s website to see if one of their areas of focus corresponds to your interests. Attend some of the frequent seminars and presentations on a wide spectrum of international issues.

#### **4. WHAT SPECIFICALLY IS 'INTERNATIONAL HEALTH'?**

As students heading for careers in medicine, PLME and medical students often are seeking 'international health' experiences. However, there is no single definition of 'international health'. For many it means working in a developing country providing care or doing research. For others it may involve working with developed countries or countries in transition to develop educational programs or solutions to health problems here or abroad. It may range from clinical medicine to the development of public health infrastructure such as clean water and sanitation. For everyone working abroad, a commitment to partnership, mutual trust, and teamwork is essential. The desire to learn from others and broaden our individual and collective understanding of the world drives many involved in international work. As you develop your plans, keep in mind this broad nature of 'international health', and be specific and clear in your own mind and with others about what it is you would like to do.

#### **5. PLANNING**

Plan ahead! Many opportunities exist for students who are designing international experiences, which involve study, service (volunteer or paid), or research. A key factor in achieving your goals will be planning far enough ahead to take advantage of these numerous opportunities. Networking at Brown and beyond to build relationships and open doors takes time – often months and years, not days and weeks. For example, consider the following steps, each of which may require considerable time:

- Finding a mentor at Brown by taking courses, working as a teaching assistant, doing research under faculty supervision, etc.
  
- Taking the courses to qualify for a particular program abroad. For example, there are minimum language course requirements for students participating in formal Brown semester abroad programs conducted in the native language.
  
- Getting letters of recommendation from faculty. Faculty mentors and colleagues outside the university will respond as quickly as possible to requests for letters but they all strongly appreciate having plenty of advance notice (we suggest a minimum of 2 weeks but longer is far better.)
  
- Submitting applications for funding. Some grant sources may make awards only once or twice a year on fixed dates rather than on a 'rolling' basis. Some prefer to receive applications months before the deadline to have enough time to give preliminary feedback to the applicant.
  
- Getting a new or renewed U.S. passport may take 6-8 weeks under new procedures.

- Obtaining entry and work visas can take months depending on the country. Work visas, like entry visas, must be obtained from the country embassy in Washington, D.C. BEFORE you leave the U.S.
- Immunizations for some diseases involve a series of shots, such as for hepatitis B, and can take months to complete.

## 6. DEVELOPING YOUR INTERNATIONAL EXPERTISE

### Language Study at Brown

Many students come to Brown having studied a language in high school for 3 or more years. Often this background is in French or Spanish and both of these languages can be invaluable in international work depending on your area of interest. Consider building on such expertise while at Brown to achieve a high level of fluency by taking advanced level courses. If you want to study a new language, start early while your academic schedule (and your brain) has the most flexibility. Brown offers instruction in the following languages: Arabic, Chinese, Czech, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish. For more information, consult the annual *Brown Course Announcement*, visit the website and office of the Center for Language Studies <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/CLS> and the websites and offices of the specific language departments.

### *Maintaining Your Language Skills at Brown*

Those who already are proficient in one or more languages other than English should make every effort to maintain such language skills.

Here is a sample of some creative ways to do this in Providence:

- Volunteer as an interpreter at a Brown-affiliated hospital. Some students find this to be a rewarding way to serve while maintaining their skills. Look into the Interpreter's Aide Program at Rhode Island Hospital; or a local health clinic such as Clinica Esperanza or Crossroads or RI Free Clinic.
- Volunteer as a tutor in Providence schools. Many immigrant students speak a variety of languages. Brown students with knowledge of these languages may find special volunteer tutoring opportunities to assist students as their English skills improve. Consider volunteering with BRYTE, tutoring refugees from a variety of countries.
- Live in French House or Spanish House (Machado), dorms reserved for students with these language interests.
- Attend special lectures, workshops, and films presented by the language department of your interest, even if you are not formally affiliated with the department.

- Use the extensive self-learning materials of the Language Resource Center located on the 6th floor of the Sciences Library Building at the corner of Thayer St. and Waterman  
**St**<http://www.brown.edu/Departments/LRC/index.shtml> which includes, for example, videotapes of the daily news from 30 countries.

## Language Study Abroad

### *Brown Exchange Programs*

Brown has formal affiliations with numerous international universities for one or two undergraduate semester programs. Specific information about these programs and their requirements can be obtained from the Office of International Programs (OIP) website and advising staff, the extensive collection of resource materials in the OIP library, as well as from OIP's booklet, *The FAQs of Study Abroad* Non-Brown Exchange Programs

Students may participate in international exchange programs of other U.S. universities and the OIP can help you identify the more valuable programs. However, to get credit for courses taken within such programs, the student must get prior approval of their specific academic plan.

### *Immersion Courses*

For students seeking short-term intensive 'immersion' language courses abroad, the OIP can provide information, especially for those programs affiliated with Brown partner universities. Private commercial programs can be found via the Internet by searching for language courses in a specific country. Such programs may combine intensive instruction with living with a local family to facilitate language practice. An example of such a program, which some Brown students have utilized, is the IPEE Costa Rica Spanish program <http://www.ipee.com/> Some language programs are combined with opportunities to learn about the local health care system. Check with others who have direct experience with such programs before you shell out your hard-earned down payment.

## **PLME SPECIFIC EXCHANGES:**

The PLME has specific summer exchange programs that may fit into your overarching plans. Specifically:

- Traditional Chinese Medicine program at Zhejiang University School of Medicine in Hangzhou China
- Comparative Health Care Systems and Chinese Medicine at National Cheng Kung University School of Medicine Tainan, Taiwan.
- Aging and Comparative Health Care Systems: Rostock, Germany
- Medical Ethics and Comparative Health Care Tuebingen, Germany

For more information:

<https://www.brown.edu/academics/medical/plme/current-students/enrichment-activities/international-health-scholarship>

### **Country/Regional Study**

Having expertise in a particular discipline and knowledge of the country or region you work in will make your experience more enjoyable, add to your ability to both learn from your experience and make a valuable contribution, and possibly increase your chances of obtaining funding.

The flexibility of the Brown Curriculum and the PLME gives undergraduates the opportunity to choose a concentration, or design your own that is related to international work. Take the time to do a page-by-page scan of the current *Bulletin of the University* and the annual *Courses @brown* to identify the many programs, institutes, centers, departments, and courses, which are available to you. For PLME students who major in a science, the required humanities and social science “cluster” provides an alternative way to build a small group of courses with an international focus. With other students who share your interests, consider putting together a “GISP,” group independent study project, to meet your specific needs.

Consider becoming a student member of one of many international health advocacy groups to increase your knowledge of key issues of international health. The American Medical Student Association (AMSA) has an active global health section which you should explore

<http://www.amsa.org/global/global.cfm>. Another key organization to consider joining is the International Health Medical Education Consortium

[https://www.who.int/workforcealliance/members\\_partners/member\\_list/ghec/en/](https://www.who.int/workforcealliance/members_partners/member_list/ghec/en/) Attend the annual February student meeting of the New England chapter of this organization in nearby Waltham, Massachusetts, sponsored by the Massachusetts Medical Society. More information about this is available through the International Health Institute.

### **Research**

Opportunities abroad for undergraduates and medical students often involve participation in an existing or new faculty research project, either in the U.S. or outside the country. Having research experience and skills, whether based in the laboratory, a healthcare facility, or the community, will enhance your ability to participate in such projects. Most students would like to propose and carry out their own research project, but you may be more likely to be successful, at least until you have established a track record, by joining an existing faculty research project. See the *Research Opportunities Roadmap* for additional information.

## **7. DEVELOPING A STUDY, WORK, OR SERVICE EXPERIENCE**

After discussion with faculty and fellow students, and consultation with the appropriate offices at Brown, students should contact organizations outside the university as needed.

Undergraduate study abroad should be arranged through the Office of International Programs (OIP).

Undergraduates and medical students seeking summer jobs or volunteer positions with international non-governmental organizations, either in the U.S. or abroad, can contact those organizations directly, seek assistance through faculty and students who have worked for those organizations, and



consult the Brown University Career Services. Two additional sources regarding U.S.-based NGOs are: Global Health Council <http://www.globalhealth.org/> and **Interaction** <http://www.interaction.org/>.

Medical students may do clinical electives abroad through an established Brown program (current exchange programs :

<https://www.brown.edu/academics/medical/education-programs/other-programs/international-exchange-programs>

University of Rostock, Germany;

University of Tuebingen, Germany;

Technion, Israel

University of Bologna

Zhejiang University in Hangzhou China

NCKU in Tainan, Taiwan,

University of Sao Paulo, Brazil

Tokyo Women's University Tokyo Japan

Kyoto University School of Medicine, Kyoto Japan,

Kurume School of Medicine Kurume, Japan

EWHA, Seoul Korea

KNUST Ghana

University Notre Dame D'Haiti,

Moi University School of Medicine Kenya

Contact the faculty liaison listed to discuss options for application.

Several good sources of information regarding overseas clinical electives are available including: *International Health Electives for Medical Students*, <http://www.amsa.org/> A long list of possibilities by country.

*International Health Care Opportunities in Family Medicine: A Guide for Practicing Family Physicians, Family Practice Residents, and Medical Students*, 3rd ed., published by the American Academy of Family Physicians, 326 pages.

<http://www.aafp.org/cgi-bin/ihcp.pl> - search

Massachusetts Medical Society's Global Medicine Network lists many links to elective opportunities and other resources <http://www.globalmedicine.org/>

## 8. FINDING FUNDING

### *Resources at Brown*

The *Fellowship Office*, Dean of the College, maintains a list of Brown and national fellowships available primarily to undergraduates and graduating seniors.

**[http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean\\_of\\_the\\_College/index.html](http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/index.html)**

The PLME office has prepared a table of awards/fellowships available to undergraduates and medical students, many of which can be used for international experiences

<https://www.brown.edu/academics/medical/plme/current-students/enrichment-activities/international-health-scholarship>

[And each AMS program exchange notes funding provisions if provided.](#)

Most of these Brown fellowships for undergraduates and medical students have predictable application deadlines from year to year. Students should familiarize themselves early with these fellowships and their deadlines.

### *Resources Outside of Brown*

See the International Health Institute website for a partial listing of other funding sources. There are literally hundreds of internet sites which may be helpful, some of the most useful of which are listed on the IHI website.

Check the websites of the national medical specialty organizations of interest to you. They may have fellowships to support international work.

### *PLME International Exchanges*

See the International Exchanges website (link below) for more information on the (ZUSM, NCKU and German exchange programs.

<https://www.brown.edu/academics/medical/plme/current-students/enrichment-activities/international-health-scholarship>

## 9. BEFORE YOU GO

A partial checklist of items to consider during your preparation to study, work, or do research abroad:

- Accommodations
- Communications: mail addresses; internet access; phone numbers; cell phone
- Cost/Stipend/Fellowship/Fund Raising
- Course credit from Brown
- Clarification of duties/responsibilities
- Equipment/Supplies
- Experience of others
- Education planning

- Immunizations/Malaria prophylaxis
- Insurance
- Journal of your experience
- Knowledge of the country and its health system/health challenges
- Language study
- Leave of absence
- Mentors at Brown/abroad
- Photographs of your experience: standard film (better for publications) versus digital (easy to send and good for PowerPoint presentations)
- Passport
- Research materials/data collection
- Register with Brown SOS Sojourn which connects with the US Department of State  
<https://www.brown.edu/campus-life/safety/resources/international-sos>
- Safety issues/travel advisories
- Travel plans/tickets
- Visa/work permit

The U.S. Department of State website is the best source of information regarding passport and visa information as well as travel advisories <http://www.state.gov/>

## **10. WHEN YOU RETURN**

Consider returning to the U.S. with enough free time before you start the next phase of your education to get some of your materials together to share your experience, many of the programs require a “reflection”: reviewing your data; writing papers, articles; preparing posters, presentations. Beyond the academic value of such efforts, showing that you have product from your work will enhance your future efforts to design experiences and find financial support. It is important to have time for “re-entry” to life at Brown. Meeting with your PLME advising dean or other advisers is very helpful in this regard.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

This *International Opportunities Roadmap* is intended to assist you in getting started with your planning for an international experience, whether it is undergraduate study, research, or a medical student elective. The PLME and Brown’s Alpert Medical School are strongly supportive of students who seek this addition to their Brown educational experience. Although the resources mentioned above are only a small fraction of those available, your PLME and medical school advising deans are ready to help you dig deeper into the many opportunities available. We look forward to working with you!