

Criteria for Approving New Global Education Courses & Programs

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Background Assumptions

1. There are two general types of credit-bearing global education programs at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Short-term courses (typically 3 hours of credit) which GCTS delivers directly, and semester-long programs which are offered in collaboration with other universities, seminaries, or study abroad partners. It is desirable to have some institutional continuity and consistency across this programming.
2. The proposed criteria will offer institutional guidelines for approving new international academic programs at GCTS. It is understood that not every criterion need be present for a program to be approved. In general, however, the greater the number of criteria present, the stronger a proposal will be regarded.
3. If embraced by the appropriate stakeholders, it is assumed that the criteria will be used as a template for evaluation by any group or individual who is part of the official protocol for approving new global education programs at the seminary.

General Criteria for Reviewing Proposals

Philosophical Considerations:

1. **Rather than pursuing an open-ended proliferation of international programs, it is recommended that we develop a limited set of carefully screened global education program opportunities.**
Rationale: This will allow us to have a closer, more personalized relationship with each of our off-campus partners and thereby maintain more effective quality control. Furthermore, a more focused effort will reduce program management costs associated with our international programs and better ensure the financial sustainability of the program.
2. **In general, GCTS should seek to develop programs that make education abroad accessible to the greatest number of students.**
Rationale: The criterion of access is consistent with both our philosophical and theological commitments. It is also compatible with the spirit of the new strategic plan approved by the GCTS Board of Trustees in January, 2009.
3. **A diversity of program models should be utilized.**
Rationale: Given the unique needs of graduate students with their complex personal, family and professional commitments, the optimal timing and length of international experiences militate against a monolithic delivery format. Choice also enables students to select from a variety of programs based on the depth of their previous cross-cultural experience, and the cultural distance with which they are prepared to engage. In addition, a variety of program models might more effectively accommodate the variety of student-learning styles.
4. **Preference should be given to programs that are fair-minded in the presentation of controversial issues unique to their particular program or cultural context.**
Rationale: Consistent with educational philosophy and practice on GCTS campuses, preference will be given to the programs which seek to present thoughtful and fair-minded perspectives on a variety of cultural practices, political and economic ideologies, and Christian

traditions represented by the culture and context in which the program is embedded. Programs which model Christian civility and grace with regard to competing world views would be particularly valued.

Academic Concerns:

6. **The academic integrity of programs and institutions under consideration should be carefully investigated.**
Rationale: Information on local/national reputation, rankings, and previous accreditation reviews provide valuable clues as to the academic rigor of an institution.
7. **Approved programs should reflect academic rigor that is commensurate with that of a traditional Gordon-Conwell education.**
Rationale: This should be viewed as a priority rather than a strict guideline, as other program attributes must also be weighted. Programs should have educational objectives that complement and correspond to both our GCTS Mission Statement and Degree Goals.
8. **Short-term study abroad courses offered through GCTS should be evaluated in the same manner as classes taught on campus.**
Rationale: Wherever possible there should be consistency in the protocols and policies for delivering and assessing classes both on and off campus.

Curricular Considerations:

9. **Curriculum integration represents a higher-level institutional commitment to internationalization.**
The more deeply embedded international courses are in the curriculum, the more seamless they are with a student's on-campus coursework. In the interest of true curriculum integration, there may be instances where selected international courses are strongly recommended for particular degree programs.
10. **Consideration should be given to the curricular impact of the proposed course.**
An impact analysis should be conducted to determine the effects on course sequencing in the degree program, particularly for courses offered in alternative years. When required courses are offered overseas, plans should be made for accommodating students who are unable to travel or participate in the course. Long-range impact, if any, on faculty load in the division should also be calculated.
Rationale: A simple impact analysis decreases the probability of surprise complications in the future.
11. **For both short-term courses and semester-long programs, a list of pre-approved course equivalency determinations should be attached to the proposal.**
Rationale: It is important to establish ahead of time how credits earned off-campus will satisfy program requirements at GCTS. It would be unfair to students who devote precious time and resources to study abroad in GCTS-approved programs if credits earned did not transfer back to satisfy program requirements.
12. **Global education programs at GCTS should seek to maximize the cultural immersion dimensions of the educational experience.**
Rationale: Quality study-abroad programs should avoid "academic tourism." It is preferred that a program incorporate as many elements of cultural immersion as possible, including but not limited to home stays, residence halls populated by national students, community service projects, meaningful immersion in local churches and a brief introduction to the local language.

However, multifaceted cultural immersion should be a priority, not a strict requirement. In some cases the academic value of a program and other related attributes may offset a weaker cultural immersion element. It should be noted that semester-long experiences generally result in a more comprehensive cultural impact than do three-week courses.

13. **The geographic distribution of study-abroad programming should be considered.**
Rationale: As each region of the world offers its own unique opportunities for cultural learning, the variety of programs available should reflect a balance of regions that differ from each other in terms of language, culture, and levels of economic development. It is important, however, to encourage students to study in regions that stretch them beyond the comfort zone of their own culture.

Financial Concerns:

14. **Ideally, the cost of a semester abroad should be consistent with that of a full-time student on a GCTS campus.**
Rationale: The greater the differences in how program costs are calculated, the more we open ourselves up to potential confusion and criticism by students. We are also committed to equal access to global education programming on the part of all our students. In other words, our goal is for cost not to be a barrier to program participation.
15. **Airfare should be rolled into the cost of an international semester abroad.**
Rationale: This will also help to ensure that cost is not an impediment to participation. Some study-abroad partners are receptive in helping us realize this goal.
16. **With short-term courses, every effort should be made to contain costs to ensure broad participation.**
Rationale: Notable variations in “course fees” (logistical and travel costs beyond tuition) between trips should be clearly explained and justified. This will help move us toward greater continuity in program costs.
17. **The financial integrity of programs and affiliated institutions should be investigated and reviewed.** This may include a request for annual reports where culturally appropriate. Where relevant, letters of agreement should also be developed, clearly defining the parameters of each institution's financial responsibility.
Rationale: Financial accountability problems undermine the credibility of study broad programs.

Miscellaneous Considerations:

18. **The potential for recruiting students from other seminaries and graduate schools should be investigated.**
Rationale: The cross-fertilization of ideas and perspectives with students from peer institutions might further enhance the quality of student learning. It would also offer the opportunity for outside students to benefit from Gordon-Conwell’s global education programs.
19. **All new semester-long programs under consideration should be given provisional status before final approval is granted.**
Rationale: This allows the reviewing body to observe and evaluate a program through actual participation.
20. **In those cases where students have enrolled in a program during its probationary period, a summary of student feedback should be attached to the proposal.**
Rationale: It is always valuable to solicit student perspectives and feedback in evaluating new

program initiatives. Additionally, it is important to compare official descriptions of a program with students' first-hand experience in it.

21. **Safety concerns are a high priority and should be systematically considered.**
Rationale: Given the rise in global economic, environmental and political turmoil, GCTS has a moral and ethical responsibility to carefully consider the relative risks of each study-abroad location. Students need to be fully advised of relevant safety concerns prior to their participation in the program. The seminary reserves the right to cancel programs up until departure and/or while in progress if the conditions pose a heightened potential of danger to students.
22. **Priority will be given to proposals of semester-long programs where an "on-site director" is present.**
Rationale: Quality control over a program is improved and more likely to be achieved when a resident director is on site. There is also a built-in safety net and advocate for student concerns.
23. **Preference should be given to reviewing new programs proposed by our established study-abroad partners.**
Rationale: It is beneficial for Gordon-Conwell to cultivate and maintain ongoing relationships with our partners as we are already familiar with their philosophies, procedure, and practices.
24. **Priority should be given to processing proposals that enjoy strong division support.**
Rationale: As a matter of principle, internal institutional requests should be given priority over those from outside parties, vendors or institutions. Such proposals, especially those for semester-long programs, should be encouraged as a means of enriching departmental curricula and internationalizing our campus. Rarely, if ever, would a program be approved which is proposed by an individual faculty member, but not supported by his or her department or division.
25. **While student demand will be a consideration in the selection of new program sites, it is only one of several concerns.**
Rationale: In terms of long-range planning, programs should first be considered in terms of their own educational value and objectives. Student demand may grow once a program has been established. The final decision to launch and sustain new program sites will be made on a case-by-case basis depending upon the track record of student interest and the financial strength of the Seminary.

Diagram of Approval Process for Courses Delivered in a Global Context

Protocol for Approval of New Required Courses

Proposal > Division > Sp. Asst. To Provost > EPPC > CFO > Campus Dean > Provost > Full Faculty
 Chair for Global Education

Protocol for Approval of New Elective Courses

Proposal > Division > Sp. Asst. to Provost > CFO > Campus Dean > Provost
 Chair for Global Education

Protocol for Approval of Previously-Approved Required or Elective Courses

Proposal > Division > Sp. Asst. to Provost > CFO > Campus Dean > Provost
 Chair for Global Education