In this week’s Advising Advice column we delve into some common scenarios involving academic plans and study abroad.

Scenario One: Dora is a first year student who has not declared a major. She is interested in studying abroad but has heard you can only do that later on in college, so she hasn’t brought it up with her Advisor. She thinks she’ll just wait until she’s declared a major and a little further in to start her research on it. What would the advisors say about this?

Blaise: I want my advisees to tell me their whole plan, right from our first meeting. Even if it’s tentative, or they think it’s silly or a long way in the future, it’s is still important for me to know so I can get a whole picture of who my advisee is and what their interests are. Study abroad also requires a fair amount of preparation, so bringing these ideas up sooner than later can help us plan together.

Laura: I agree -- discussing study abroad early is so important! It allows you to plan ahead both academically and financially. For some students, knowing in advance that they will spend a semester abroad helps steer the course choices they make now. I often recommend that students wait to take Core classes, such as cultural interpretation and international, until they are abroad. That way you’ll a) have greater flexibility in choosing your study abroad program and b) be able to take advantage of unique classes to satisfy this requirement, such as British Heroes: From King Arthur to Harry Potter.

Scenario Two: Daniel’s friends have told him about their study-abroad experiences. The programs sound really interesting, but he is sure he couldn’t afford the cost, so he hasn’t talked with anyone about it. Besides, he thinks that kind of thing is just for fun, and not related to what he’s doing here at USM.

Blaise: Lots of people feel like study abroad is not for them for financial or academic reasons, but I encourage students to check-in with their Academic or a Study Abroad advisor before ruling it out. This is an important skill: learning to gather information and ask questions so you can make informed decisions. Just working with assumptions could lead to you missing a great opportunity. Many majors have the flexibility to accommodate a semester abroad, and the skills and experiences you gain while abroad can add real impact to your resume.

Laura: When thinking about study abroad, don’t limit yourself to the traditional “junior year abroad.” USM offers short-term travel courses, which are one- to three-week programs that run during winter, spring, and summer breaks. Groups go to one or more countries with USM faculty and peers to study a specific topic. Past destinations have included England, China, Spain, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and South Africa. There are many advantages of travel programs: they are relatively short, affordable (and often partially covered by financial aid), and help you earn credits toward your degree. For students with less flexible majors, travel programs are a great way to have a meaningful international experience without delaying graduation.

Want to know more? Go to: https://usm.maine.edu/international/study-abroad