

Going Global With Your PhD

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Research in the field of psychological science provides many opportunities for personal and professional growth. One way to take advantage of these opportunities is to study abroad, where you can find new scientific perspectives and research methods as well as improve your career options. Leaving home is about going outside of your comfort zone and broadening your horizons, allowing you to foster knowledge of a new culture — sometimes in a new language — and forcing you to think outside the box. Working toward your doctorate in another country also allows you to build an international CV, which in turn provides more opportunities for employment, scholarships, training grants, project funding, international visibility, and business collaboration in the future.

There are, however, significant obstacles to pursuing your PhD abroad. There are several considerations you should address before you start packing your bags:

Evaluate your stress potential: Although individual experiences vary, composing a doctoral thesis is most often a long and time-intensive commitment. This can be even more stressful in another country, where you are far from your usual social network. There will be moments of distress, stress, and loneliness, all of which may impact your time abroad. Before you go, it is important ensure that you can manage your time well, meet deadlines, avoid procrastination, and handle frustration healthily.

Think carefully about where you want to live: Going abroad for your PhD will allow you to experience a new culture with local practices that probably are different from your own. You will need to develop alternative ways to debate and negotiate your perspective with your advisor and other researchers, as well as get used to new rules, laws, and bureaucracy.

Start your search for the university at least 6 months in advance: After you identified your potential research field, it is important to select institutions with doctoral programs in departments that have current professors engaged in your research topic. Ask for information about the documentation, supervisors, funding, degree requirements, and fees before you begin planning your research proposal.

Build a good relationship with your supervisor: Although cultural differences and language barriers may complicate your relationship, it is important to make sure that your supervisor is aware of your struggles, ideas, and goals. Your supervisor should know how to manage expectations and anxiety and guide you through academic life at your new university.

Once you are accepted by a doctoral program abroad, there is still much to do. Below are some basic requirements to help with your preparations:

Academic record, resume, and personal statement: You will need official copies of all relevant diplomas, certificates, and transcripts. If these documents are not in English, you should obtain official translated versions. You may be required to submit your resume and a personal statement specifying

your objectives and determination to do your PhD. Focus on describing your research area and how your experiences and qualifications will contribute to the field. Recommendation letters are essential and should be provided by your previous academic advisors, university tutors, or people who supervised you in a work or volunteering setting.

Proficiency language exams: You may have to present evidence of language proficiency. The most common official language for international doctoral programs is English. If English is not your first language, you may be required to take a language proficiency exam such as the TOEFL or IELTS tests. English-speakers may also be required to take proficiency exams in other languages. Make sure that if you take an exam, it is accredited by a national authority such as a foreign office or ministry of education.

Visa: Visas typically include limits on the duration of a student's stay. You should contact the immigration bureau of your host country and ask how you can increase your stay as well as find out which documents you need. Besides the national identification documents, the consulate may ask for travel insurance, your address abroad, justification of the trip (this can be a letter of acceptance from the university along with your airplane ticket), and a letter of economic dependence (this can be written by a relative and must be stamped in a notary's office) or proof of means of subsistence. Whether you receive a visa as a researcher, student, or worker may vary depending on the national legislation.

Healthcare: If you become ill in a foreign country, remember that the medicines and health services are different from those in your country. Before you leave, familiarize yourself with the private and public services of your host country and search for an international health insurance plan.

Finances: Check with your bank to learn about the best options for international transactions, especially how to avoid high costs with exchanging currencies. It is also advisable to look into how public finance and social security work in the country where you will be living. Foreign citizens may have to pay taxes based on their visa. Be prepared to have unexpected costs and issues with bureaucracy. It is also important to budget for rent, food, transportation, and overall economic conditions of the host country.

PhD funding: This is available from a range of sources, but it is important to know where to look. Consider applying for research fellowships, university scholarships, international PhD funding (e.g., Erasmus+, a European Union program that supports education, training, youth, and sport in Europe), or loans. The majority of universities have funding and bursaries available to support students; these may include merit-based academic scholarships, need-based scholarships, and international scholarships. You can sign up for PhD newsletters and PhD funding blogs (e.g., <http://postgraduate-funding.com>; www.topuniversities.com; www.phdportal.com) to learn about opportunities. Additionally, you can support yourself by working while you pursue a PhD. This will provide an additional source of income, but be aware that it can also decrease your productivity and affect your schedule.

All the challenges you confront as you work toward a PhD in a new country help to make it worthwhile. Living abroad is a life-changing decision, but the knowledge and real-world experiences you will gain while you expand your professional network, develop friendships, and open borders into the globalized world is priceless.