Studying abroad
It's not just a summer trip for undergrads

Studying abroad is no longer considered a summer vacation for the undergraduate set. In fact, graduate programs are emphasizing global experience — even building it into some graduate degrees.

“We see a steady increase every year, says Kim Gradel of GradSchools.com, which claims to be the top online graduate school directory. “Students are looking to come out of a degree program and be competitive. They want to stand out from other students who have completed their degree here,” she says.

Patrick Boyle, associate provost for global initiatives at Loyola University, agrees. “We have seen a steady growth in study abroad. It has been growing very quickly, and there is a lot more interest from graduate students and for international internship experiences,” he says. “It’s a fairly important area of activity for us at Loyola and I think it’s growing throughout the United States.”

Boyle says about 500 students, both graduate and undergraduate, study at Loyola’s Rome campus every year. The grad students study law, education and business there. “I would describe all the graduate programs there to be specially focused courses that offer students an opportunity to experience being in Europe,” he says. “For example, the school of education has a popular program that is always full to capacity.”

Loyola’s Rome campus has been popular with students for 50 years. They eat, sleep and study there in the heart of the city. “Rome is our campus,” he says.

Boyle himself spent a semester studying French abroad as an undergraduate. “After I left that short summer experience, I wanted to live and study internationally,” he says. He eventually got a graduate degree in Paris from a French school.

Business schools are more and more likely to offer international experience as part of the MBA degree. Perhaps the best known is the University of Chicago Booth School of Business executive MBA program. It requires students to spend one week each at its London and Singapore campuses. Likewise, its foreign students rotate through Hyde Park. It’s not an extra travel costs are built into the program.

“There are very few industries out there where global exposure is not key to doing one’s job,” explains Patty Keegan, associate dean of the Executive MBA Program North America. “They have the ability to make contacts with other Chicago Booth students within 50 different countries. Everyone speaks English, and most are in mid- to upper-level management positions.”

Northwestern University’s Kellogg Graduate School of Management requires students to take at least one course with a global focus. Some of these have travel built in. Kellogg students also have the opportunity to spend a quarter of their second year studying abroad at one of Kellogg’s 30 partner schools. They are located on six continents, in cities from Beijing to Buenos Aires.

Gradel says that in addition to business schools sending students to Europe or Asia, many law schools offer a year abroad. “We also see a huge demand for students going into international relations,” she says. “There are also a lot of summer research opportunities in place like Germany, which is well known for its research in the sciences.” GradSchools.com helps students find programs that offer the experiences they want. “I look at what the demand trends are and provide the resources to help them,” she says.

With the high cost of graduate school in the United States, there is another trend emerging — getting one’s entire graduate degree at a foreign university, like Boyle did in the 1980s.

“A lot of American students are looking to get a master’s degree abroad because you can sometimes get it in one year with discounted dollars and get the international experience,” Gradel says. “For example, if I’m going to a U.S. institution for two years I might be paying $35,000 a year in tuition. But I might be able to pay $20,000 to $25,000 a year internationally. Also, many countries like Finland and Germany don’t have tuition. Students just pay a small fee.”

Gradel adds that contrary to popular belief, U.S. federal financial aid does apply at some international schools. According to GradSchools.com, there are 400 international universities that accept the Stafford Loan.

“As for the language barrier, a lot of international universities offer courses in English. It’s also the global business language,” she says.

Gradel says international schools want to recruit American students because many governments abroad are decreasing funding to their educational institutions, such as in the UK. “They are looking for students who are used to paying their own way,” she says.

Conversely, Europeans are looking to come here because they want a U.S. degree to broaden their experience and marketability, she says. “It’s like the planets are aligning.”