

Study Abroad in Bern Switzerland:

Mental Health, Emergency Medicine, and Global Resilience

July 19-August 17, 2019



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Sarah Lawrence College and New School for Social Research in partnership with

The Consortium on Forced Migration, Displacement and Education

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Director: Adam Brown
Professor of Psychology
Sarah Lawrence College and New School for Social Research

Introduction

Bard, Bennington, Sarah Lawrence and Vassar colleges have joined forces to form the *Consortium of Forced Migration, Displacement and Education (CFMDE)*. This consortium was formed as a response to the unprecedented acceleration of forced migration throughout the world due to war, political/ethnic/religious persecution and poverty. Our students will be engaging in a number of different learning initiatives including at the core, an innovative shared curriculum in Forced Migration across all four campus.

As a signature project of CFMDE, the Bern, Switzerland program offers undergraduate students from across Consortium colleges to visit and learn about issues and challenges facing asylum seekers and other displaced communities in Switzerland. Over the past few years, there has been a rapid spike in the numbers of individuals who have fled to social, political, and environmental crises to Europe, including Switzerland. **Switzerland is fourth in the number of refugees they accept per capita and individuals seeking asylum currently are from Eritrea, Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey and Somalia.** Additionally, a growing number of migrant workers from Central and South America, such as Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, have been seeking economic opportunities in Switzerland.

Considerable research and reporting has documented that refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers experience considerable social, political, and economic hardship throughout the migration process. Additionally, a large proportion of these individuals are exposed to severe stress and trauma before, during, and post-migration. As a result, there is a growing body of research showing that many refugees report high levels of mental health issues, such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression. Such mental health issues not only impair one's own well-being but can also interfere with a wide range of daily activities such as parenting and work. Despite the growing recognition that many refugees migrating and seeking asylum in countries like Switzerland, there remains an urgent need to develop more effective systems in the assessment of mental health issues as well as increasing the availability of appropriate treatments.

Among the various spaces in which there has been an increase in refugees seeking care for mental health issues in Switzerland are 3 hospital Emergency Rooms. For a variety of cultural, legal, and historical reasons, asylum seekers appear to be utilizing ER's in Europe for non-acute issues, such as depression and anxiety. Two years ago, the University of Bern Department of Emergency Medicine embarked on a partnership with Sarah Lawrence College and New School University faculty member Adam Brown to create and test a multi-lingual survey to be used in the ER while patients are waiting to see a doctor. In addition, Professor Brown and colleagues in Bern are now expanding this project to other hospitals throughout Switzerland and are beginning to develop brief, culturally appropriate, low-cost, psycho-social interventions for refugees seeking care in the ER. It is their hope that these efforts will help to provide the ER with critical information to prevent and treat chronic mental health issues in these communities.

Admission Requirements

Students should contact their home school study abroad office for the following application materials due **March 1**:

- ❖ A completed application
- ❖ Statement of Interest
- ❖ One letter of recommendation (from a course that covered the study of mental health such as Abnormal Psychology) and approval from the study abroad office
- ❖ An official transcript

Three students will be nominated by their home school to be interviewed by Dr. Adam Brown who will select two candidates from each college to participate in the program. The third candidate will be considered an alternate participant should one of the other two candidates decide not to attend the summer program.

Program Costs:

- Air fare*: \$1500 (estimated for travel to and back from Bern + internal program travel costs)
- Room*:\$800 (single dormitory room, University of Bern)
- Meals: \$600(students are responsible for all meals and this estimation includes some cooking of own meals)
- Personal expenses in country: \$750 (estimated and may vary depending on student's travel and personal needs)
- International medical insurance: \$70 (for duration of study abroad program only)

****Please note that air fare and room costs will be arranged and billed by Sarah Lawrence College****

Program Description

This intensive 4-week summer semester in Bern, Switzerland will be administered by Sarah Lawrence College under the direction of Dr. Adam Brown, professor of Psychology at Sarah Lawrence College and the New School for Social Research. The semester abroad will begin with an orientation at the University Of Bern Department Of Emergency Medicine and to the work being conducted with refugees in the area of mental health. Students will have the opportunity to work under the supervision of Dr. Adam Brown (Professor SLC and NCSR), Julia Superka (graduate student), McKenna Parnes (graduate student), Dr. David Srivastava (Department of Emergency Medicine University Hospital Bern), Dr. Sabrina Jegerlehner (Department of Emergency Medicine University Hospital Bern), and Dr. Professor Aristomenis Exadaktylos (Director of Emergency Medicine, University Hospital Bern) on existing projects and will be expected to design and test their own smaller independent project.

Eight students (two from each consortium college) will attend workshops and lectures led by local experts and scholars throughout Switzerland. In addition, students will also be visiting and volunteering with local refugee organizations.

Under the guidance of Dr. Brown, the students will learn about the current research and methods being employed in global mental health, how to carry out mental health research in diverse settings, and basic research and statistical methods used in mental health research. Students will also receive training in how to interpret data and writing up findings for publication.

Students will learn directly from local experts and the communities about the experiences of migrants and refugees. This will include meetings and workshops with medical experts, policy makers, and social entrepreneurs. Additionally, students will have opportunities to meet with refugees involved in these organizations and to hear about their experiences interfacing with the healthcare system.

Through fieldwork and writing students will be prepared to:

- Develop and understanding of how to conduct mental health research
- Be exposed to a variety of methods and contexts in which refugee mental health is being conducted
- Participate in daily didactic and research learning
- Collaborate with local scholars, practitioners, and policymakers working at the intersection of mental health and displacement.

Course Goals and Expectations

The goal of this 4-week summer intensive program is to tackle mental health issues among forcibly displaced individuals in Switzerland. The topic is sparsely researched, even though refugees and asylum seekers have shown elevated rates of PTSD and depression. Building on the existing collaborations between the University Hospital in Bern, Sarah Lawrence College, and the New School for Social Research, students will have the opportunity to learn about many of the healthcare challenges faced by individuals that have been forcibly displaced while working and learning in the Department of Emergency Medicine in Bern.

Students will draw on mixed model approaches; they will develop skills in collecting and analyzing quantitative data related to the types of mental health issues and factors underlying mental health vulnerability and resilience. Students will also be trained various types of interview and assessment methods, read about the ways in which global mental health approaches aims to contextualize and connect individual mental health risks and resilience in relation to social, political, and economic factors through history and compared to migratory journeys, past and present. Findings will be used to work with members of the refugee community to inform public health outreach programs and treatments.

These projects are ideally suited for students interested in the intersection of medicine, healthcare, psychology, research methods, translation, statistics, politics, history (and emerging fields in history such as the history of emotions, or migration journeys and migrant knowledges). Students would also have many opportunities to engage with and learn from local refugee NGOs and refugee-led civil, artistic, and advocacy initiatives.

Accommodations

All students will be housed in university housing. Students are in furnished single rooms with a shared bath. Further information can be found at: <http://www.vbsl.ch/en/unfurnished-rooms/tscharnergut/?oid=1877&lang=en>. Meals are not provided and students are responsible for all meals. There are kitchens in the dorm as well as restaurants and food stores nearby to both the dorm and the university hospital.

Study Abroad in Bern Switzerland: Mental Health, Emergency Medicine, and Global Resilience Summer 2019 Calendar

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| <i>Friday, July 19</i> | <i>Arrive in Bern, Switzerland and move into dorms</i> |
| <i>Saturday, July 20- Sunday, July 21</i> | <i>Orientation to city and university</i> |
| <i>Monday, July 22</i> | <i>Students begin work at University Hospital</i> |
| <i>Friday, August 2-Sunday, August 4</i> | <i>Weekend Excursion TBA</i> |
| <i>Monday, August 5-Friday, August 16</i> | <i>Site visits and continued work at University Hosp.</i> |
| <i>Saturday, August 17</i> | <i>Students must vacate housing and depart Bern</i> |