



# Developing Sustainable Institutional Partners Student-Athletes Abroad

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## Background

Beyond Sports was founded in 2010 by two former basketball teammates from Willamette University who, through their own international experiences, saw an opportunity to create international travel, cultural immersion, and service-learning opportunities for U.S. students-athletes using sports as a vehicle for building cross-cultural friendships and promoting mutual understanding. Beyond Sports has since grown and now offers team trips for NCAA teams as well as college tours for individual student-athletes participating in a variety of sports including lacrosse, field hockey, softball, golf, volleyball, and basketball.

In 2015, Beyond expanded to offer academic programs, including a semester long study abroad program to Costa Rica through their sub-organization, **Student-Athletes Abroad**. SAA provides experiential learning and academic programs to student-athletes and offers both short term programs (J-term, spring break, and summer internships), as well as longer term faculty-led or semester long programs. Their programs rest on four key pillars: athletics, academics, service-learning, and adventure. For many student-athletes, the key in their study abroad experience is the ability to continue practicing and training for their sport back on campus. SAA acknowledges this need and provides the adequate programming and resources to allow student-athletes to continue their training uninterrupted.

## Moving Forward

SAA is currently focused on building sustainable partnerships with the ultimate goal of expanding the number of feeder schools for the SAA semester program. The program launched in 2016 and thus far all enrolled students have come from Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio. The Wittenberg partnership model is mutually beneficial as SAA is receiving up to 20 semester students each academic year, and Wittenberg student's are continuing to pay their home school tuition, which financially beneficial to the university.

## Overall Goal

SAA's goal is to identify and foster 5-10 new university partnerships similar to the Wittenberg University partner model developed in 2016 with Student-Athletes Abroad (SAA). University partners will commit to sending students to SAA semester and short-term programs in Costa Rica, South Africa, Spain, and Australia, and will be open to promoting new study abroad programs at our sites in development.

## Strategies to reach overall goal

- 1) **Increase exposure to target market:** By May 2018, collect inquiries about semester programs from 45% of the target market.
- 2) **Cultivate personal relationships with key administrators:** Coordinate visits to potential partner universities to solidify relationships with administrators and faculty: include both study abroad offices and athletic departments. Utilize conference attendance for meetings with potential partner universities.
- 3) **Enroll student participants:** By January 2019, enroll a total of 30 students from up to four new partner universities in the Costa Rica semester program.
- 4) **Establish partnerships:** By December 2018, sign four MOUs for ongoing partnerships to begin during the spring 2019 semester.

## Who We Are & Where We're Going

### Positioning Statement

College athletes at every level of competition have unique challenges and barriers that typically prevent them from accessing traditional study abroad opportunities. Student-Athletes Abroad offers programs geared specifically to meet their needs through specific programming, training opportunities, and time-frames that fit with an athlete's schedule. Unlike other third-party providers, Student-Athletes Abroad designs programs with the purpose of engaging athletes in a variety of international opportunities including short-term summer internships, short-term faculty led programs, semester programs, and short-term foreign sports tours utilizing sport as a tool for cultural immersion, which is not within the portfolio of any other study abroad provider.

### Mission and Vision

Mission Statement
We connect the world through sports by removing barriers preventing student-athletes from studying abroad and engaging both U.S. student-athletes and local community members in mutually beneficial athletic engagements and service-learning activities.

<b>Vision Statement</b>	We aim to continue growing our programs to reach a larger international audience and develop sustainable programs that utilize sports as the vehicle to bridge cultural gaps and form long-lasting relationships between U.S. student-athletes and international students, athletes, and local community members.
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## Target Market

The the optimal segment within our target market is of Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities with strong Division III athletics programs. We are focused on the Midwest and Mid-atlantic region currently as that as where we have had previous success, and these regions are saturated with schools that fit this profile, as well as schools that are financially stable.

<b>Qualifying Dimensions<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Determining Dimensions<sup>2</sup></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher Education Institutions offering BA programs</li> <li>• Schools with NCAA Division I, II, or III athletic teams</li> <li>• Schools with NAIA athletic teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Division III athletics</li> <li>+ Ranked private liberal Arts Colleges (Range: #40-200)</li> <li>+ Forbes Financial Health Status Rating of B or lower</li> <li>+ Regional focus on Midwest and Mid Atlantic</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> These are all schools that qualify as a potential partner institution for SAA programs in general, and potentially for the semester program

<sup>2</sup> These are the additional factors ideal of a new partner school based on background research and previous success

## Partner Cultivation Strategy Overview

The following promotion strategies have been identified to enhance the ongoing marketing and recruiting efforts for the development of new institutional partnerships. These strategies aim to both improve and refine the ongoing efforts of this project and are mainly targeted at collecting inquiries from interested universities in the first stage of the partnership development process. Generating a large lead pool will increase the overall numbers in our lead funnel and increase our conversion rates from inquiry all the way to established partner.

These strategies address both the specific pain points from university administrators, as they are doing their own vetting of study abroad providers, and address the pain points that we have internally managing inquiries, facilitating communication/dialogue, and tracking leads.

### Online Presence & Credibility

Update Student-Athletes Abroad website to include a landing page for potential partners with an embedded inquiry form to capture leads that may come to the website directly. Include relevant information for universities such as the school of record, list of current university partners, brief program descriptions & eligibility requirements, and crisis management information. This will provide university representatives with a complete snapshot of what we are offering and show our accreditation as a program provider.

<b>Pain Points</b>	University administration in study abroad offices and university faculty want to see a professional, reputable, and accredited organization. They are interested in an accessible and user-friendly platform with concise information, key details, and a quick form to request further information.
<b>Action Items</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Update website to include a landing page for prospective universities	The current website provides great information for students and parents. A web page dedicated to universal stakeholders will be a useful starting point for interested university admins and will give SAA a more professional look and appeal.

Add inquiry form to website specifically for university administrators	If administrators/university representatives find us on their own, we will have a way to capture this and allow them to engage with us further if desired.
Update website to include testimonials from SAA alumni (similar to Beyond Sports Testimonial page)	Adding student stories and testimonials about our academic programs will make SAA look more well-established and give administrators an idea of the key takeaways and learning outcomes of our programs from a student perspective
Add relevant information for potential partners to website. Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School of record info</li> <li>- List of current partner schools</li> <li>- Brief descriptions of SAA programs</li> <li>- Cost structure overview</li> <li>- Crisis Management procedures</li> <li>- Staff roles</li> </ul>	Adding this information to our website will be especially important for representatives that find SAA on their own, or through a student who they are advising. Having this information available to external audiences will make SAA appear more professional and reputable as a third-party provider and put administrators at ease, especially those who are approving student's participation in our programs even if we are not on the school's approved program list.
Display adherence of Standards of Best Practice guidelines by Forum on Education Abroad <sup>3</sup>	Reference to the Forum of Education Abroad's Standards of Best practice affirms that we are serious about professionalism and following the best practices set by this standard setting international education organization.

## Targeted Outreach Campaign

Create a systematic outreach plan for contacting leads within the identified target market and a system for collecting new leads, tracking connections with universities, and nurturing leads through the partnership process. This strategy focuses on efficiency for lead management and prioritizing the most promising potential partners within the target market.

<b>Pain Points:</b>	Staff have limited time and resources available to dedicate to partnership development and program promotion. Creating a narrowed scope and specific outreach plan can maximize efficiency and reduce the potential for duplicate efforts from multiple staff.
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<sup>3</sup> Appendix 2: Forum on Education Abroad standards and State of the Field Survey Results



Action Items	Rationale
Create a recruiting calendar identifying target regions and schools for campus visits broken into three tiers; hot leads, warm leads, cold leads	At this point, we do not have a clear picture of our in-person recruiting calendar for the short and long-term. Planning in advance will allow us to strategize which schools we are targeting based on regional position as well as their status as a hot/warm/cold lead.
Implement an outreach plan for initial emails to 'untouched' universities and delegate one staff per school for all correspondence	Creating a master list of all universities that fall within our target market and who we have not connected with in the past will give us an idea of the volume of new potential leads we have to tap into, and allow us to strategize how and when to reach out to all cold/untouched schools.
Utilize Salesforce, or a similar CRM to build out leads/contact database <sup>4</sup>	A Customer Relationship Management platform such as Salesforce will allow us to track key aspects of our relationship with universities. Having key information stored in one place is essential for streamlining our outreach and having quick and accurate access to all the essential details of a partner relationship. <sup>5</sup>

## The Personal Touch

Establish face-to-face contact to cultivate personal relationships. This can be done through in-person campus visits with key administrators, as well as skype or zoom calls, online webinars, and conference attendance/presentations. This strategy also includes maximizing the SAA alumni network for introductions and building program awareness through students directly.

<b>Pain Points:</b>	University administrators don't want to deal with back and forth communication with new providers over the phone and over email. Each university has a unique process for approving external programs and the best way to reach study abroad offices directly is through in person campus visits and in-person meetings at conferences.
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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 3 for more recommendations on how to make the most of Salesforce/comparable CRM for university relations management

<sup>5</sup> Current [Google Sheet](#) with University Outreach tracking tab can be updated with all team member's outreach history as a starting point for lead tracking

Action Items	Rationale
Schedule meetings with DI, DII, and DIII schools both on campuses and at professional conferences	Being face to face with a university administrator allows us to quickly cater the conversation to meet their interests/needs and helps speed up the process of identifying synergies for potential collaboration.
Schedule meetings with multiple stakeholders from one university	Once a lead has showed promise, identifying how to capitalize on this potential market is the next critical step. Investing time to meet with multiple potential stakeholders will allow for cross-selling from the beginning and confirm that we are targeting the right representatives from the university. This can be done either in person (ideally), or virtually through a call or skype chat.
Skype/zoom or online sessions/ official meetings	These should be arranged further along in the partnership development process. As an initial meeting, all potential stakeholders should be included on the virtual meeting and there should be a clear and methodical agenda to follow, involving everyone on the call as appropriate. Ideally, there will be follow-up meetings scheduled on a regular basis once the partnership is established to stay updated with the university representative and make sure we are staying relevant. Being face-to-face allows for further relationship-building and collaboration which is key to building a sustainable partnership.

## Communications Flow Plan

Developing and understanding a systematic process for how to push our leads through the funnel from inquiries to established partnership will provide clearer goals for each stage of the partnership development process and further streamline communication processes amongst staff involved with partner cultivation.

The activities that occur throughout the partner cultivation process are broken down by stage in the funnel<sup>6</sup>:

### **Inquiries**

#### **March 2018- September 2018**

- Collect leads through targeted emails, conference meetings, personal connections
- Utilize program alumni for on-campus presence and meetings
- Utilize CRM for lead tracking and create a prioritizing system
- Create an embedded inquiry form to collect leads through the website

### **Vetting**

#### **April 2018- December 2018**

- Determine how mutually beneficial it may be to set up a partnership
- Find synergies
- Determine the existing academic program offerings at the institution
- Work to send information as requested
- Discuss program approval process

### **Negotiation**

#### **September 2018- May 2019**

- Discuss process for approving programs in detail
- Determine tuition structure/ discount, additional scholarship offerings, faculty involvement, room for growth/ cross selling

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<sup>6</sup> Appendix 4 includes visual for timeline of lead stage distribution over the next 20 months

- Conduct online Information sessions/ webinars for interested stakeholders
- Arrange a campus visits if necessary or requested
- Attend study abroad fair if requested

### **Trial Programs**

#### **January 2019- August 2019**

- Send students on short term programs
- Invite university staff for a site visit
- Connect university with program alumni for direct feedback from past participants<sup>7</sup>

### **Established Partnership/ signed MOU**

#### **February 2019-**

- Signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or other formal agreement to include: pricing, specific approved programs
- Faculty-led program agreements and budget
- Yearly student numbers if negotiated

### **Retention & Cross-Selling**

#### **February 2019-**

- Expand program opportunities and cross-sell
- Create an on-campus presence through alumni network
- Visit campus for annual check-ins
- Attend fall semester study abroad fair to recruit students

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<sup>7</sup> This would potentially be a task for the new campus ambassador program

## Summary and Next Steps

This document is meant to serve as a guide and reference point for staff members engaged with the process of working on partnership cultivation at Student-Athletes Abroad. Currently, Student-Athletes Abroad employs one full-time staff member, the Director of University Relations, to focus seeking new business opportunities with universities. In the future, as SAA continues to grow, there may be more individuals involved in the cultivation of new partnerships and maintenance of existing partnerships. The communications flow plan and utilization of the capabilities of a CRM will be especially useful to avoid duplicating efforts, cross-checking information, and increasing our efficiency with recruiting new partner institutions.

SAA is already implementing the “Personal Touch” strategy by reaching out to universities attending conferences and doing campus visits in the target region. We have seen our lead volume grow even through attendance and exhibiting at one conference (Forum on Education Abroad), so the next steps with these new leads will be to follow the communications flow plan and track outreach and communication efforts in one place for future reference and follow-up.

While building sustainable institutional partnerships is an iterative process that takes time, having a systematic approach will ensure that we are maximizing staff time and keeping a narrow focus on the greater goal of establishing partnerships with universities who are committed to sending students to our semester program in Costa Rica.

## Appendix 1: Our Impact

This visual aid is meant as a reference for external audiences who are seeking a quick 'by the numbers' snapshot of what Student-Athletes Abroad has accomplished thus far and where they are going in the future. It can also be utilized internally as a way to remind ourselves of the breadth of our impact and how we see ourselves growing in the future.

## Appendix 2: Forum on Education Abroad References

### The Forum Standards of Good Practice

The collective list of data provided in this section is taken from the Forum on Education Abroad's State of the Field Survey Report from 2015. The information most relevant to Student-Athletes Abroad is the data regarding the approval of new programs, particularly from the perspective of University Study Abroad offices approving 3rd party provider programs.

These lists can serve as a guide/ rationale answering the following questions related to partnership development:

- What are administrators looking for when going through the program approval process?
- Which university administrators most commonly have the responsibility of reviewing and approving new programs?
- What value proposition should we be pitching in conversations with university administration?

### 10 Factors Considered when Deciding whether or Not to Approve a Program<sup>8</sup>

1. Academic Quality
2. Health and Safety
3. In-country support (e.g. resident directors, co-curricular activities)
4. Cost
5. Quality of program administration and ease of working with the program provider
6. Ability to manage risks
7. Possibility for exchanges
8. Experience of former students

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<sup>8</sup> From [Forum on Education Abroad State of the Field Survey Report](#)

9. Program structure (e.g. direct enrollment, hybrid, field study)
10. Whether a provider offers many programs of interests (vs. just one or a few)

How U.S. Institutions Approve External Education Abroad Programs<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> From [Forum on Education Abroad State of the Field Survey Report](#)



Top Three Factors that Would Help Increase the Number of Education Abroad Students<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> From [Forum on Education Abroad State of the Field Survey Report](#)

## Appendix 3: CRM Recommendations

Assuming that Salesforce will be integrated into the Student-Athletes Abroad/ Beyond Sports daily operations and replace existing CRM systems we use, the following processes for partnership cultivation can be integrated into the CRM platform as a way to streamline communication, increase efficiency, better track progress with universities, and access all relevant information in a central location.

The new CRM can be utilized for the following aspects of partnership development:

### **Inquiries/ Lead tracking:**

- Within each individual's contact record, set follow-up "tasks" or "reminders" for email follow-up, initial outreach, etc.
- Log notes from calls in the contact log after phone calls, skype calls, or even in-person meetings
- Track and update stages of the lead: "inquiry, vetting, negotiation, trial, partner"
- Automatically add all emails with a university affiliated email address to that university contact record in the CRM
- Track and rank priority of multiple stakeholders at the same university

### **Existing Partners:**

- Store MOU agreement information
- Store updated contact information for main point of contact
- Set reminders for scheduling check-in outreach emails
- Add partners to email campaign for holiday greeting, other news updates, etc.

### **University data:**

- Track all program alumni information for each university (inquiries and existing partners):
  - Beyond Sports Individual Tour participants
  - Team Trips: name of coach, name of team, and student information
  - Student-Athletes Abroad Summer Internships
  - Coaches names from Foreign Sports Tours
  - Faculty affiliated with programs (any short-term faculty-led programs)

## **Appendix 4: Timeline for Lead Stages**

The timeline lays out the key stages of partnership development and where each stage will likely peak over the next 20 months.