

Investigations into Study-Abroad Programs

By Carina Zaragoza

The New York Attorney General's Office has expanded its investigation of study-abroad programs offered by colleges and universities across the country. The investigation is headed by Attorney General Andrew Cuomo, who made headlines in recent years with his investigation into the student loan industry.

Fifteen institutions received subpoenas this month. These 15 colleges and universities were selected because of suspected agreements between them and study-abroad providers. The subpoenas come only a few months after several study-abroad providers were contacted by Cuomo's office last August and September. A few of the providers have publicly acknowledged the investigation, have complied with the subpoenas, and have since sent the requested documentation to Cuomo's office.

The investigation into study-abroad programs began last summer. A *New York Times* article suggested officials working with study-abroad programs might be influenced by perks from study-abroad providers. Among the perks, free overseas travel for school officials was cited, as well as stipends to market programs to students.

How and why institutions choose study-abroad providers are among the questions Cuomo's office hopes to answer. The *New York Times* article alleges that preference for some programs over others due to possible kickbacks limits students' choices and even puts in peril students' safety while abroad.

These allegations are reminiscent of allegations of inappropriate relationships between schools and lenders made during the student loan inquiries. This investigation makes it publicly known that potential conflicts of interest among schools, school officials, and businesses will be scrutinized.

Both investigations bring to light a potential trend within higher education. Is it possible that these are just two examples of schools receiving incentives? Could other areas of the college experience be subject to outside, and monetary, influences? With this new investigation into higher education institution practices, some of these questions may be answered and at the same time prompt school officials to reevaluate their practices.

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