

Considerations for Beginning a Study Abroad Course

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These are random thoughts of steps that need to be considered / addressed in order to make a group study abroad class trip effective. The process takes time and planning should be started at least 24 months before the planned first student trip.

- Decide what are the desired **learning outcomes** – the type of experience, educational preparation, and support will vary accordingly. Length of trip, activity- travel study tour, service learning, field research, and what study expertise is needed.
- Start as you would for any class. Write **the syllabus** and define **the assignments** and **what assessments** will be used for learning/transformational changes – IRB approval
- What other faculty or staff expertise do you need on **the course leadership team**? Who will accompany you and be your co-instructors? Relationships with students, co-faculty, and hosts.
- What **preparation class or orientation meetings** are needed – this depends on the type of class being conducted. Maybe orientation meetings, a Pre-Travel class for credit with its own syllabus, maybe a post-reflective class?
- Outline the **proposed schedule for the student learning experiences**, just as you would do for the activities/laboratories in any class – prepare to describe what resources will be needed at each activity – costs? availability on site?
- Research your **university and college rules/guidelines** and offices of support to make this possible. Credit rules and faculty course approval, international office approval, budget and rate requests, risk management and travel planning.
- These classes are not possible without **partners/friends on the ground**. Where do you have relationships on the ground that can make your desired experience possible? This can be other attendees at professional conferences, university graduates, friends, or colleagues at your university or industry leaders
- **How many students** do you want/need for this to work feasibility budget wise and experience wise. What ratio of faculty to students can you afford? Are the faculty paid for 12 months?
- What expertise do you need of **the hosts/local resource people**? Language, culture, research, technical skills, people skills, knowledge?
- The course leadership **team exploration trip** – attempt to follow the exact route and lodging, meals, etc. that you intend to take students. Building relationships is CRITICAL!
- **Who on the ground in –country** will plan the lodging, transportation, meals, and activities? Price everything – estimating budgets is very difficult.
- **How are you going to recruit** – who is the competition? Students select based on location, expected experience, class faculty leaders, and costs. You must have the cost/price solid before you can expect students to commit.
- Stay in regular contact with all students who express interest. Continue to feed students information about trip regularly - they have many other options and attrition is likely. **Prepare methods of communication** – university phone, blogs, etc.
- **Plan methods to manage money** and the accounting and receipting for the group expenses. Especially in a predominately cash economy. Plan to reconcile the accounting - direct charges to the credit card, ATM withdrawals in country, and cash expenditures.
- **Design appropriate Reusable Learning Outcomes** (blogs, videos, CD's, pictorial libraries, impact statements) to use in promoting the course in subsequent years.
- Plan, Plan, Plan and then once the trip begins, be flexible and go with the flow. **Make it a good FUN** and educational experience for everyone.
- Adjust the future course syllabus, budgeting, experiences, orientation, and recruiting and retention based on **feedback from initial/current students**.

Studying abroad: Culture shock, then real life

By Ashley Detzner

For the Journal & Courier

Everyone says studying abroad is a life-changing event that gives you new perspectives and a broader outlook on the world around you — and that you *have* to study abroad during your undergraduate years, or take a gap year, or do whatever it takes to make it happen.

Blah, blah, blah. Everyone says that. Do you want to hear something different, something down-and-dirty true about study abroad? Because you know as well as I do that no matter what people say, you have to experience something yourself to be able to have a proper opinion of it.

So here it is, my brutally honest, almost short and somewhat sweet account of my study abroad experience. The Dominican Republic is

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a Third World country. They drive like maniacs. Personal space is nonexistent. Trash pickup is more than a little irregular. You will probably be very hot, rather sunburned and a least a little bug-bitten. If you flush toilet paper, you may be in for a nasty surprise. Restaurant and store service tends to be very slow and sometimes subpar. As a girl, you will hear lots of pickup lines, some sweet and some not so much.

And you know what? I love it. All of it.

Things are pretty darn different from life back in the States (obviously), and at first, there's certainly some culture shock. But once you get over the initial surprise of thwarted expectations, you start to pick up on the "whys" and not just the "what the hecks," and boy,

will that open your eyes.

If you arrive with an open heart and an open mind, then you are in for the ride of your life.

Studying abroad is a life-changing experience, not because everything will meet your expectations, but because some things certainly won't. But that is the most important part.

Going somewhere totally new, immersing yourself in another culture and putting your language skills to the test is all fine and dandy, but learning how to go with the flow when the unexpected arises in a foreign environment will give you new eyes for surveying the world and a new heart for those around you, and those are way more valuable souvenirs than the chucherias (cheap trinkets) you buy from that guy in the market. Studying abroad really is

about the good, the bad and the ugly, and that is what makes this such a great experience — you are living in real life, and you know that not everything in real life is always good. When you study abroad in a new country, you will feel a wide range of emotions and have all sorts of new thoughts that never occurred to you before, and it's your job to make the most of it.

These are the reflections that will change who you are. Not just the classes, the host family or the excursions, but the little things that make you think, that make you question what you know, that change the way you see yourself and your own little niche.

Detzner, an Indiana University student from Lafayette, is finishing a study abroad program in the Dominican Republic.