



OVERSEAS & OFF-CAMPUS PROGRAMS HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

Self-reflection, critical thinking, and a flexible perspective help to make time spent abroad a more socially conscious and personally engaged experience. Actively participating in your program will encourage self-growth, help you to dive deeper into the culture you are living in, and will urge you to draw greater connections between your life abroad and your life back home.

Ultimately, it is up to you how to approach your semester abroad and what you take away from it. Every Lewis & Clark student brings a unique perspective to their overseas program. Identity plays a powerful role in how a student experiences the society and culture of their host location. By exploring your own sense of self, how that relates to the identity you hold at Lewis and Clark, and how that stems from your identity back home, you can build a platform for expanding your perspective and exploring how you fit into contexts beyond that of which you've experienced before. This experience is unique to every person, but we hope that this packet of resources, activities, and articles will help to get you started on your own journey of understanding yourself and understanding the world around you.



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RESEARCH & CRITICAL THINKING

One of the most important things to do before arriving in your host country is researching your host city/country. Learning concrete information before arrival will help you break down stereotypes and have a more open mind when meeting new people. It can also help to avoid the exoticization and othering of your host country, contextualize your role as a study abroad student from an American college, and provide a basis of information for you to expand on once you arrive.

Seeking information through credible news sources, social media, documentary films, historical literature, modern biographies, and students who have studied abroad before you will all provide unique perspectives on the social/political climate of your host country.

You'll be able to answer some of these questions with a quick Google search, but others may not become salient until you've spent a few months living in your host country. We recommend re-visiting these questions once you've been on your program for some time to see how your perception of the answers have changed. Another useful exercise is to apply these same questions to your home country/culture. You might find that they don't have simple answers, and are in fact quite nuanced and difficult to put into words. Recognizing subtleties like these will complicate your understanding of your host country, and serve as a reminder that nothing is truly black and white:

- What are the host country's official languages? What are the social and political implications of language usage?
- Are there ethnic minorities? What languages do they speak?
- How many people who are prominent in the affairs (politics, athletics, religion, the arts, etc.) of your host country can you name?
- What is the most prominent religion? How do members of the predominant religion feel about other religions?
- What are the attitudes toward divorce, abortion, marriage equality, drugs/alcohol use, atheism?
- Is the price asked for merchandise fixed, or are customers expected to bargain? How is the bargaining conducted?
- What things are considered taboo?
- What kinds of television programs are shown? What social purposes do they serve?
- How does your financial position and living conditions compare with those of the majority of people living in this country?
- How are children disciplined at home?
- How does this society observe children's "coming of age?"
- What kind of public transportation is available? Do all classes of people use it?
- Are the largest circulation newspapers/news sources generally friendly in their attitude toward the United States? How does local coverage of the election compare to coverage in the US?
- How many people have emigrated from this country to the US? To other countries?
- What kind of health services are available? Where are they located?
- Is education free? Compulsory?
- In schools, are children segregated by race, caste, class, or sex?
- Where are the important universities of the country? If university education is sought abroad, to what countries and universities do a majority of students go?

PROBLEMATIC RHETORIC: EXOTIFICATION OF YOUR HOST COUNTRY AND CULTURE

The rhetoric used in the field of study abroad can be extremely problematic. Terms like “exotic,” “third-world,” or “adventure” can act as an othering mechanism that objectifies your host country/culture. Understanding the historical context behind and political implications of using these terms is important not only in reducing problematic interactions between yourself and the people you will meet while abroad, but will also influence the way you carry yourself and the perspective you hold during your time abroad. Think about the language you use to talk about your host country. Think about why you are going abroad to study, and why you chose the program you did. Think about how your perspective on why you are there may influence the interactions you have with your peers, host families, or professors.

While Lewis & Clark overseas programs don't focus on volunteering abroad, you undoubtedly will come across experiences to volunteer, tutor, or work with local non-profits or organizations. In these situations, it is common for students, particularly students from the US, to enter in to a problematic power dynamic. [Pippa Biddle, a Lewis & Clark alum, has written widely on the problems with “voluntourism:” the trend of tourists traveling to a particular place for the purpose of taking on a volunteer position.](#) Pippa challenges this trend on economic, interpersonal, and systemic levels to uncover the problematic aspects of doing volunteer work abroad. Her work is definitely worth a read to unpack some of the rhetorical issues with voluntourism - which can be translated to your experiences studying abroad. While your primary role won't be as a volunteer, the same rhetoric may apply to the way you or your family and friends back home refer to your semester abroad.

The Voluntourist's Dilemma

What's the cost of giving back?

Published on 02/18/2016



SELF-REFLECTION, IDENTITY, AND PLACE

Studying abroad can influence your perception of self and your understanding of the community/society that you consider home. One way you come to understand yourself is in seeing examples of people and places who differ from you (or people you *think* will be different from you). There is a reciprocal relationship between you are today, and who you will be when you fly back home next year. Your expectations influence your experience - pay attention to that, think about what aspects of your identity are most important to you and how those may morph and change over the next semester. Think about *why* your identity shifts when you study abroad. The future “you” is greatly informed not only by the experiences between then and now, but by the expectations and hopes that you enter this semester with. This process of fully engaging with personal change and critically thinking about your experiences depends on both conscious and subconscious goals, expectations, and assumptions.

RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY ABROAD

There may be certain parts of your identity that you feel more closely connected with than others. When you travel and live in other places around the world, you may find that some aspects of your identity are moved to the forefront - this process may be frustrating and confusing. One common example is national identity. While abroad, a student's nationality often becomes the primary identifier used when meeting a new person. Many students from US institutions report that they've never felt more American than they did when they were abroad - especially given the current political climate. This example isn't universal - students of color have reported that the question of nationality is particularly difficult to navigate. If they don't fit a stereotypical trope of what it means to be an American (perpetuated in cinema and other media consumed around the world), people may assume that they are not American.

The experience of navigating your own identity in a new space is personal - hearing others' reality, even if they don't mimic your unique perspective, can help you put your experiences in words. Below are a few resources (articles, projects, websites) that may help you contextualize your process of finding your new/altered identity while abroad:

[This project aims to document the experiences of students studying abroad all around the world.](#) While they may not include your host location, it's a good tool to get you thinking about how other students have confronted aspects of their own identity through the lens of their host culture.

[Think about what it means to belong to a society or culture.](#) Do you feel a complete sense of belonging in any community? What aspects of your identity may elicit a sense of belonging in your host country? Which aspects might make you feel out of place?

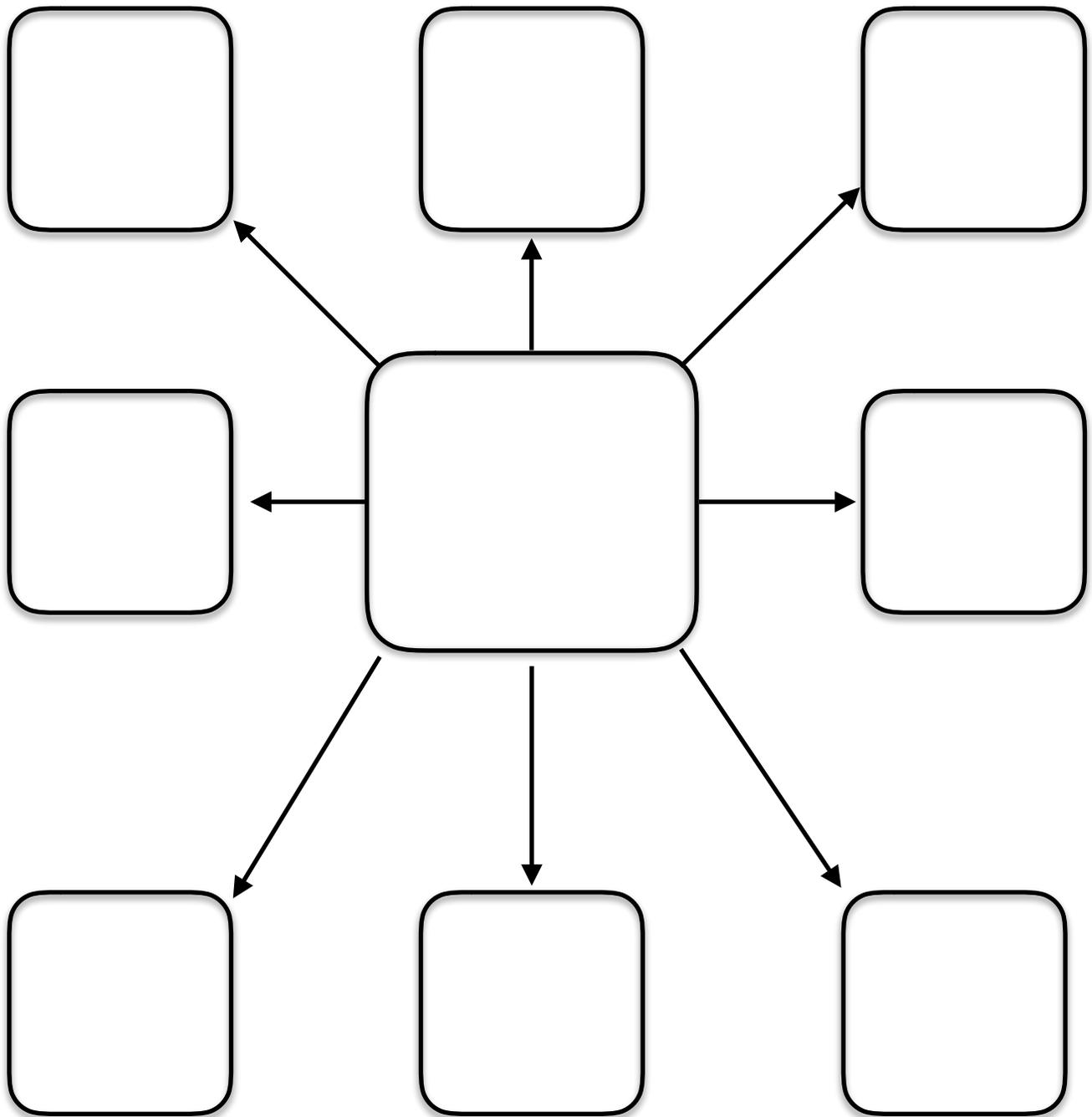
[Your experience is not the same as your fellow LC-program peers.](#) Despite similarities or common ground between yourself and your trip mates, there is no doubt that each individual person on your program will have unique and varying experiences on the program. When processing thoughts and feelings with your group members, it is important to be sensitive to the fact that your friends may have different perspectives than you. An experience that was overwhelmingly positive for you, may have been extremely challenging for your peer. Keep an open mind, and be observant of how your LC peers are going - check in, be supportive, and look out for each other.

[Taking a weekend trip outside of your host city, or traveling extensively post-program may bring about another adjustment in identity.](#) While you will adjust to navigating your new space with a degree of ease, traveling outside of your host country may bring up new points of contention or shifts in perspective. Be prepared for change as you travel, and think about why these differences may exist in various regions that you encounter.

IDENTITY WEB ACTIVITY

*Adapted from Maximizing Study Abroad

Take a few minutes to complete this diagram. In as many boxes as you can, write a word you feel describes you or is a significant part of who you are or how you choose to identify yourself to others.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- If you had to pick just one box, which would it be? Two? Why are these the most important parts of your identity?
- Did you have difficulty filling in all eight boxes? Did you find eight was not enough? What insights have you gained about yourself from this exercise? Is there an identity that others don't readily recognize in you? Is this okay? Or is this frustrating?
- Go back to the diagram and add some of the values you attribute to the boxes. For example, if one box says "student," values from being a student might be "independence," "respect for knowledge," or "question authority." After adding the values, consider if there are places where the values conflict. How have you managed to cope with these conflicts?
- How might these boxes change when you are abroad? For example, did you list your nationality in the boxes? How might it feel to be seen as just one or another box?
- How might the roles you play in the US be similar and different in our host country?
- Think about a person from your host country filling out this identity web. How might their answers differ from yours? What does this exercise illuminate about generalizations?

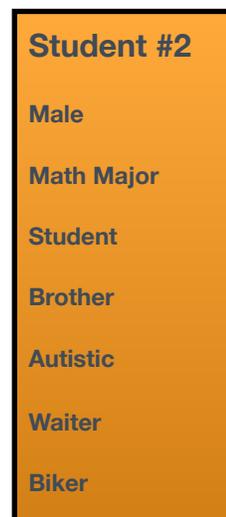
The various roles that we play in life have an impact on our identity, shaping our sense of who and what we are. Below are some of the identities given by three study abroad students who filled out a personal culture diagram, followed by the reactions they had to this activity.

STUDENT #1: My number one identity is Chicana. It shapes everything I do, and I'm very proud of this. However, my identity is also very tied up with being a woman, specifically a woman of color. Culture and gender are huge issues for me because they've had to be. It's impossible to be a minority woman in this country and not confront these identifiers as a part of life because that's how everyone else sees me.

STUDENT #2: I mostly identify as a math guy - especially now that I'm in college. I think I'm a good student, and I like that about myself. Not very many people know that I'm autistic, but I do think it's a big part of who I am. Sometimes it's important that people know that about me, but other times I'd rather they didn't.

STUDENT #3: I've never spent much time thinking about my identity. I say I'm Irish, but if I picked one or two boxes, it would never be that. I'm really an American, and I didn't even put that as one of my circles. Now that I am a mom, I realize how much this shapes me and brings out my values. I suppose I'm also middle class, but because I'm a student paying my own tuition, I always feel so poor!

It's difficult to address all the complexities about study abroad and identity in one handout. We strongly encourage you to continue to think and talk through these ideas with your friends and peers. Are certain boxes going to be less visible in another country? You may be a student that is returning to a country of heritage, a place from where you were adopted, or a place from where your ancestors left a historical or systemic mark. How will you be seen by people from the host country? Do they see you as a member of their culture? Will you be seen as solely a US American?



MENTAL HEALTH, TRANSITIONS, AND SELF CARE

As explored in the previous section, a semester abroad can bring up issues of identity, sense of place, internalized biases, and often complicates conceptions of self and society. For many people, studying abroad is a time of internal change, shifting perspectives, and can result in a re-writing of values and beliefs. This process can feel empowering - learning and experiencing perspectives that you didn't know existed, seeing yourself from the outside under a different lens than ever before, and creating a new conception of your home culture that wouldn't have been possible without distancing yourself from it. This process can also feel overwhelming. Throughout this process of self-discovery and expanding your understanding of the world, you are physically separated from your support system at home - you may not be able to talk to your family and friends as often as you do when you're at school, your methods of self-care or relaxation may become unavailable. Think about how you might cope with stress, feelings of isolation, or anxiety when your usual supports are not as available.

SELF-CARE

One common, and extremely useful strategy, for dealing with change and transitions is keeping a journal. For many people who don't write often, this task seems overwhelming - what are you supposed to write? The beauty of a personal journal is that there are absolutely no rules. You may want to start off with a [set of writing prompts](#) if you're feeling a sense of writer's block. Some people use journals to collect ticket stubs, write down random observations throughout the day, document every cafe they visited, write poetry, or doodle. It's also a good idea to continue journaling once you've returned home. [Here are some questions that can help you reflect on your experience abroad, and reintegrate into life back home.](#) We really can't stress enough how useful journaling is - not only in processing your experiences and establishing a reliable outlet for your thoughts, but also to use as a tool of reflection when you return home.

MENTAL HEALTH

Some people report feeling pressure to constantly be positive, excited, and active while studying abroad. There seems to be an expectation that you seize every moment, push aside feelings of apprehension, and avoid Netflix at all costs. For many people, it's true, studying abroad brings about a much more active and engaged lifestyle than they have at home. For some, the process can be overwhelming and exhausting. There's a saying that goes "Wherever you go, there you are." - which is important to remember for students traveling abroad who experience mental illness. Just because you're in a new setting, doesn't mean you don't need to continue routines of self-care and self-awareness. If you have a history of mental illness, it is important to think about how you will prepare to face these changes in routine, changes in expectations, and adjustments to a new culture. Despite the pressure to be "on" all the time, make sure to designate time for self-care. Don't feel bad about needing to spend some time alone, away from your program peers. If you see a therapist while at home, talk with them about a plan to keep in touch with them while you are abroad. Brainstorm how you will maintain routines of self-care when certain resources may not be accessible anymore. [Here's an article that offers some more suggestions for checking in with yourself and making space in your new routine for you.](#)

Goal Setting

It is important to set clearly defined goals for your study abroad experience. Goals have two characteristics:

Content: The object or goal being attempted

- External - relationships, language/knowledge acquisition, travel experiences, etc.
- Internal/Psychological - confidence, independence, etc.

Intensity: Factors of the goal-setting process

- Effort required to realize the goal
- Degree of commitment
- Importance of the goal

List of Goals:

Write a list of goals for your study abroad experience that includes your highest priorities and your potential challenges. Make your goals specific. Rather than saying “I want to become fluent in French,” say something more like “I want to be able to read my favorite book in French without looking up every other word” or “I want to be able to tell a joke in French and have people understand me and laugh.” Don’t say “I want to meet new people,” say “I’d like to make at least one new close friend from my host country,” or “I’d like to become close enough to a family in Senegal that they invite me to a Sunday lunch.”

You want your goals to have measurable standards. It should be written so that when you ask yourself, at the end of your time abroad whether you achieved your goals, you will be able to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ clearly. Avoid unmeasurable “fuzzy verbs” such as “understand” or “improve” in favor of concrete action-oriented verbs. If you want to say improve, specify by how much.

Once you have made your list, set priorities. What items are the most important to you? Which do you think you can reasonably accomplish in a semester? What is a stretch but you are willing to try it? Which are you already working on? For which will you need a lot of support?

In the end, have 3-5 challenging, realistic goals. Keep these questions in mind as you finalize them:

- What will you know, understand, or be able to do by the end of the semester?
- To what degree will you do it?
- By when will you do it?
- How will you know that you’ve done it?



GOALS

1

2

3

4

5

NOTES

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Amnesty International](#)

[API Diversity Abroad](#)

[Brown University - Diversity Abroad](#)

[Digital Storytelling - Queer Identities in Argentina](#)

[Discrimination Abroad](#)

[Diversity Abroad](#)

[Identity & Study Abroad Video](#)

[IME - Resources On and Off-campus](#)

[Know Before You Go - Student Resources from DiversityAbroad](#)

[LGBTQ Travel Info - Airport Security, Country-Specific Information, Resources while Abroad](#)

[LGBTQ Orientation Video](#)

[Northwestern University Study Abroad Resources](#)

[Orientation Video for Students of Color Studying Abroad](#)

[Orientation Video for Students who experience disabilities studying abroad](#)

[OutRight Action International](#)

[Resources from "How to Thrive Abroad" Workshop, hosted by IME/Karissa Tom](#)

[TSA Rights and Resources for Trans Travelers](#)

[University of Minnesota - Resources for LGBT students, students with disabilities, and students of color](#)

["Unpacking my Baggage: Re-Framing Racial Identity: - TedTalk](#)

["What I learned - Black American Abroad" - Youtube Video Reflection](#)

This list of resources is not exhaustive. We encourage you to do some online searches to expand this list in areas that are of particular interest or necessity to you. Please contact the Overseas & Off-Campus Programs office if you are struggling to find the resources you need, if you have any questions about your specific program location, or if you have any concerns about your participation on your program that you'd like to talk through before you depart.