

Study Abroad Program Elements

Lilli Engle, American University Center of Provence

Any and all study abroad programs can be broken down into to series of interlocking components, each reflecting the nature and the orientation of the study abroad program in question. An intelligently conceived program combines components in keeping with its goals or desired outcomes.

Below, the various elements that comprise study abroad programs are listed by category followed by the various options available which will in themselves determine the program design.

Component options are listed in a specific order going from less to more emphasis on cultural immersion. We are comfortable stating that the presiding goal of study abroad, *la raison d'être* distinguishing it from study on the home campus, should be to present participants with a challenge—the emotional and intellectual challenge of direct, authentic cultural encounters and the guided reflection upon those encounters.

Saying this, we naturally distinguish between "culture-based" international education and what could be termed "knowledge transfer" study abroad. Taking form primarily in such areas as biology field study, scientific exchange, art history, and the study of technological applications, the knowledge transfer study targets a form of learning which, while taking place abroad, remains nevertheless distinct from the inter-culturalist perspective of culture-based study abroad.

The complementary interface of in-class and on-site experience is, on the contrary, vital. Through real life application often perceived as more immediate and telling than that of on-campus course work, guided authentic cultural encounters tend instead to confirm the value of objective classroom learning—and vice versa—and all the more so when that learning itself takes place according to local cultural norms. We do wish to insist, however, that, with limited exceptions such as, again, certain forms of strictly scientific field work or information exchange, focused and reflective interaction with the host culture is finally what separates study abroad from study at home. And the degree to which they facilitate such experience is what most distinguishes otherwise similar study abroad programs from each other.

Here then are the major component which will determine the nature and ambition of a study abroad program. We hope that the assessment process will soon show that the options chosen from within each category have a direct causal relationship to the academic and intercultural outcomes.

Length of student sojourn

1. One to four weeks
2. Five to eight weeks
3. One semester
4. Academic year

Entry target language competence

1. No language requirement
2. No target language entry level competence
3. Elementary target language entry level competence
4. Intermediate target language entry level competence
5. Advanced target language entry level competence

Language used in course work

1. All English language program
2. Language acquisition courses with or without additional subject-matter classes in English
3. Language acquisition courses with subject matter courses taught in target language
4. Language acquisition courses with subject matter courses taught in target language plus extra-curricular target language speaking requirement

On-site administrator

1. Home university director or instructor
2. Native director or instructor (permanent on-site resident)

Context of academic work

1. In-house course work taught by American professors
2. In-house course work taught by local faculty
3. Classes with other international students taught by local faculty
4. Direct enrollment with host culture students

Types of student housing

1. Collective (apartments, dormitories) with American roommate(s)
2. Collective (apartments, dormitories) with host culture roommate(s)
3. Homestay visit (weekend to four-week host family stay)
4. Homestay rental (semi-independent) with or without American roommate
5. Individual integration homestay

Provisions for guided cultural interaction and experiential learning

1. Required linguistic exchange or other organized extracurricular contact
2. Volunteer work / internships, etc.

Guided reflection on cultural experience

1. Pre-arrival Orientation / Arrival Orientation / Re-entry debriefing
2. On-site mentoring in the form of either/or on-going, on-site orientation / class work in cross-cultural perspectives
3. Individualized cultural research projects