

Guide: Insights on Developing a Course with a Short-Term (1-2 week) Study Abroad Experience

Evidence suggests that short-term faculty-led study abroad experiences enrich student learning. These opportunities enhance students' "cultural intelligence" or the ability to communicate with diverse cultures and work well in diverse cultural settings (e.g., Livermore, 2011; Rolling, Presley, & Thornton, 2018). These experiences enhance students' academic, personal, and professional development, thus contributing to employability (e.g., Abhayawansa et al., 2024). This guide aims to define the parameters of a spring semester course with a short-term study abroad component. It is compiled from academic literature and first-hand experience. The guide will detail why short-term study abroad experiences can be as impactful as long-term ones and share insights on developing a fall/spring semester course for short-term study abroad experiences.

Why short-term study abroad?

Research has demonstrated that short-term study abroad experiences can effectively meet the HIP course objectives as stipulated by Ball State University whereby students: (a) "gain new or different perspective(s) as a result of learning from or with diverse communities or cultures," and (b) "apply previous knowledge or skills to demonstrate comprehension and performance in novel situations."

Courses designed with a short-term study abroad experience vary from courses with long-term ones, in that students learn by immersing themselves in activities and facilities that are part of the natural context. Thus, researchers note that a short duration in a foreign environment can be transformative and provide real-world experiences (Perry et al., 2012). In addition, it allows more time for student and instructor interaction before and after the study abroad experience. These meetings before and after travel enrich student learning, critical thinking, and reflection.

The shorter time also allows for travel during the academic school year. Travel during the fall or spring semester is beneficial for many reasons, including:

- a. Face-to-face class delivery is more common during the academic school year than in the summer. Face-to-face interaction engages students and the instructor as a group before, during, and after travel, increasing group bonds and trust before travel and enriching learning throughout the course.
- b. It is cost-effective. Travel costs are limited due to the shorter travel period.
- c. Students often take a full course load during the academic school year. If the student maintains the maximum credit limit for full-time status, the student

will not have to pay additional tuition costs to take the class that has an embedded short-term study away component.

- d. Students may take risks by traveling to unfamiliar places, because short-term study abroad experiences enable better opportunities to build group trust by interacting face-to-face with the instructor and other students before travel. In addition, students may perceive the issues that arise with studying abroad (e.g. homesickness) as more manageable on a short versus a long-term travel experience.
- e. It is a convenient time for students to travel abroad. There are no major holidays, particularly during spring break. In addition, unlike the summer term, students are less likely to be working full-time or completing an internship.
- f. A shorter travel period in the middle of an academic semester broadens the number of worldwide locations available to visit throughout the year. It allows travel at ideal times in different locations (e.g. temperate weather, avoid crowds during holidays, etc.).

Early planning: Selecting Course Foundations and the Study Abroad Location

To start defining the program, it is important to identify the course's primary topic and primary objective. The course detailed in the Appendix emerged from a course I taught on the international aspects of the fashion industry (e.g. sourcing, social responsibility, fast fashion, etc.). A broad topic is important in attracting students to meet minimum enrollment and to enhance student learning. Therefore, I broadened the course topic to general economic differences between the U.S. and other countries. This course objective guided decisions on the regions to travel to for the short-term study away course, such as South America, Africa, and India.

The location always poses some additional considerations. The weather is important to consider. In the example provided (see Appendix), spring break is a terrific time to travel to India. If the weather is too hot or too cold, it may adversely affect students' experience. In addition, given the shortened duration of the study abroad portion of these programs, the time it takes to travel to the location is a consideration. Direct tickets from Chicago can help limit travel time (and costs).

Cost of living in the region is a primary consideration in selecting the location. Locations with low-cost hotels and food expenses can help limit the cost of travel, making these short-term trips feasible financially for students.

Early planning the course also involves determining what unit will sponsor or support the experience and how the faculty stipend or release time to teach the course will be handled.

Traveling to the location before offering the course is helpful. It can help build networks within the country, engage first-hand with the culture, meet different tour vendors, and understand issues that might arise given the location (e.g. hotel costs, money exchange, etc.). The Rinker Center has funding available to visit the site (Study Abroad Faculty Resources | Ball State Study Abroad | Ball State University).

For more information about decision-making to develop a short-term study abroad experience, see the reference list (Saiki & Adomaitis, 2023).

Developing the Course: Detailing Course Parameters, Assignments, and Schedule

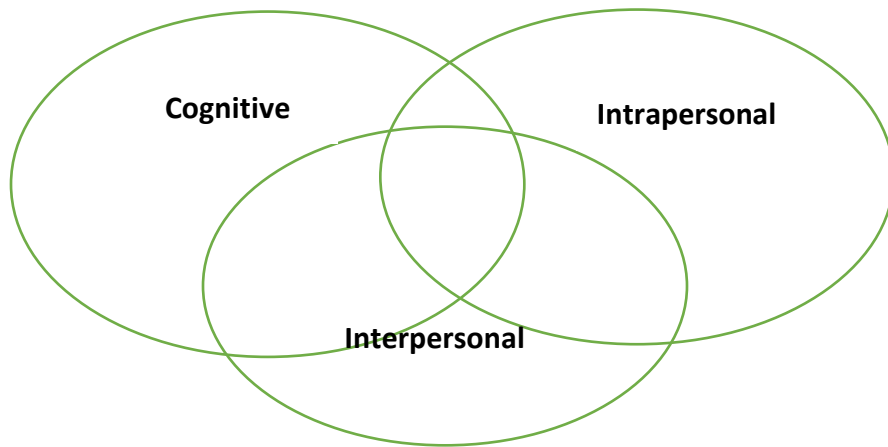
Course Parameters

Academic topics for a course that includes a short-term study abroad component vary greatly. Some suggestions include:

- a. As noted earlier, select a broad topic that can relate to a variety of majors. The broad topic will attract students across campus. Having a variety of students in different academic units is beneficial. The students not only learn about different perspectives of individuals living in a contrasting region of the world, but also about the varying perspectives of students taking courses in contrasting academic units across campus.
- b. A framework can guide the topics covered in the course. A broad framework engages a variety of students, but will also focus the topics for discussion in the class. For example, a course could use the concept of fashion and divide the course into theories of fashion (e.g. timing, psychology, economics, material and non-material products, etc.). In the example provided, economic development was the broad framework used (see Appendix).
- c. Consider developing coursework that enhances the primary skills short-term study abroad experiences provide, including professional development, soft skills, and communication and understanding of diverse cultures.
- d. Select topics that prompt critical thinking and reflection during and after the study-abroad experience (e.g. sustainability, culture).
- e. Consider topics that relate well with the Global Prospective Inventory (GPI) developed by Merrill, Braskamp & Braskamp (2012).

- Cognitive knowledge or the “degree of complexity of one’s view of the importance of cultural context in judging what is important to know and value.”
- Intrapersonal knowledge or the level of awareness of “one’s unique identity, sense of purpose, and degree of acceptance of one’s identity.”
- Intrapersonal (Affect) which is “the level for and acceptance of cultural perspectives different from one’s own and social responsibility and interdependence socially.”

Figure 1: Dimensions of Development, Global Perspective Inventory



Course Assignments

Experts suggest balancing assignments to enhance discipline-based knowledge and personal skills, with emphasis on “formative” assignments (e.g. reflective journals, discussion groups) rather than “summative” assignments (e.g. objective exams). Effective study-abroad assignments include those that facilitate reflection, particularly on-site (e.g. Ferrari, & Fine, 2015).

Ferrari and Fine (2015) suggest incorporating all three sectors in the GPI in assignment and course delivery of the study-abroad experience (see Figure 1), including tours through museums, meeting with students, eating at a local restaurant, journaling on-site, discussion sessions with students, and dialogue sessions between site speakers and students. For a short-term study abroad experience, the GPI can be incorporated in assignments and course activities before and after the study abroad experience

Given the parameters identified above, a few sample assessments for a short-term study-away course include:

- Article summary and discussion:*** Students choose an article related to the course topic and write a brief summary and analysis of it. The students

discuss their articles with other students in person or online. By completing this assignment, students develop in the *cognitive* domain of the GPI, focusing on understanding culture. It can also stimulate *interpersonal* growth. Depending on the article selected, students will understand social interdependence and social concern for others. It also develops students' *intrapersonal* skills by gaining perspective on their own views.

- b. **Preparing for travel:** Participation points can guide students in preparing for travel (e.g. complete visa, plan scheduled free time, research sites visited, etc.). These activities develop student professional skills, such as meeting deadlines, planning professional travel experiences, and completing paperwork.
- c. **Research sites:** Before travel, an assignment might require students to research the sites visited and develop questions for the onsite guide or presenter. This assignment develops students' *cognitive* knowledge on the sites visited. Student *interpersonal* skills are also developed by helping them prepare and plan to adapt to a foreign environment.
- d. **Interacting with guest speakers:** Having students develop and seek answers to questions of guest speakers develops *cognitive* knowledge of the other culture, promoting different views. If the speaker is from the country visited, the activity also develops *intrapersonal* skills by making students aware of a different culture. They also build “trust” in their interactions with individuals from other cultures. The activity is also helpful in developing *interpersonal* skills, increasing their confidence in communicating with others from different cultures, and it may enhance students' tolerance for different cultural perspectives.
- e. **Structured on-site journal:** Students can be required to keep a journal. Structure can be added to the journal by making pages for each place visited during the study abroad experience, questions and answers of site presenters, and even places to add images or draw pictures.ⁱ Multiple sources note that journaling is a critical assignment (e.g., Ferrari & Fine, 2015; Kurk et al., 2013). Students gain *cognitive* knowledge of the region, they learn about the culture and its different world viewpoint, and they may also analyze ways to mitigate cultural conflicts. *Interpersonal* skills are developed with an on-site journal in that students will become aware of themselves within a cultural context and gain new perspectives on their worldview.
- f. **Post-trip reflection discussion:** A face-to-face discussion after the study abroad experience is a powerful method to reflect upon the study-abroad experience. The instructor can pose general questions (e.g. What did you like the most/least about the experience?) and specific questions about related course topics (e.g. How did any sustainability practices observed while traveling differ from practices in the U.S.?). This activity has similar

benefits to article discussions with *cognitive* benefits (focusing on understanding the culture), *interpersonal* growth (students understand social interdependence and social concern for others), and *intrapersonal* skills (gaining perspective on their views).

- g. ***Presentation of the field study experience related to the student's major and/or interests:*** With this presentation assignment, students gain professional skills in presenting and applying their academic knowledge to a diverse culture. It depends on how the student develops their presentation, but this assignment has the potential to meet all domains of the GPI.

Course Schedule

The following list designates activities and assignments to complete at different points in a course with a short-term study abroad component. See the appendix for an example of a detailed course schedule.

- a. Pre-Trip
 - Introduce learning goals to the class;
 - Research information about the region, sites visited, and the course concepts;
 - Incorporate a group activity that builds trust;
 - Prepare for the travel (e.g. safety procedures, apply for visa as a group, research sites visited);
 - Guest speakers – Representative from the Rinker Center for Global Affairs, Speakers with expertise in the course topic, Speakers living in/who have lived in the region.
- b. During the trip
 - Reflection journal;
 - Time designated with optional activities;
 - Free time for students can schedule activities;
 - Varied required activities (e.g. museum tours, hands-on making items, shopping, group meals/individual meals, etc.).
- c. Post-trip
 - Discussion and reflection on how pre-trip course concepts relate to the field study;
 - Presentations on a topic of interest or related to the student's major;
 - Rest time.

Ball State Resources for Faculty Lead Study Abroad Programs

Ball State University Rinker Center – Information about faculty-led study abroad, <https://www.bsu.edu/academics/centersandinstitutes/rinker/study-abroad/faculty-resources>

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Appendix

Example of a Schedule of a Short-Term Study Abroad Spring Semester Course

Title: Kaleidoscope of India

Specific Course Description: This course will focus on exploring the social dynamics of India. The emphasis will be on how a foreign country/region contrasts with the United States in the infrastructure of social systems and culture. Students will investigate various stages of India's development as an emerging market from a global perspective. Students will also be able to explore the country related to their majors. This course includes a field study to India over spring break where

students will investigate various stages of India's development as an emerging market from a global perspective. Travel will occur over spring break and includes 9 days (Feb 27 to March 8). Students will examine the emerging market of India through the Golden Triangle. It is an enchanting journey from New Delhi, Agra, to Jaipur. It features some of the most extraordinary religious and historical sites in India, including one of the seven wonders of the world, the Taj Mahal.

Example Schedule, Kaleidoscope of India, Spring 2025

Date	Topic	In-Class Activities	Assignments
Jan 6	Class Introduction	Introduction	Activity #1: Answer questions on globalization concepts and India
Jan 8	Introduction Globalization	PowerPoint: Globalization	
Jan 10	Introduction Globalization	Discussion: Globalization and India	
Jan 13	Culture	PowerPoint: Culture	Activity #2: <i>Cross-Cultural Communication</i> film form and “Where I am from” form
Jan 15	Culture	Film: <i>Cross-Cultural Communication</i>	
Jan 17	Culture		

		Discussion: “Where I am from?”	Article #1 due: Globalization/Culture in India/U.S.
Jan 20	MLK Day- No Class		
Jan 22	Well Being/Social Responsibility	Discussion: “Where am I from?”	Online Discussion: Article #1
Jan 24	Social Responsibility	Discussion: Travel Plans & PowerPoint: Social Resp.	Activity #3: Identify options for activities during free time while abroad.
Jan 27	Environmental Responsibility	PowerPoint: Environmental Sustainability	
Jan 29	Environmental Responsibility	Discussion: Environmental Sustainability	Activity #4: Worksheet on sustainability; Turn in Visa
Jan 31	Environmental Responsibility	Prepare for Travel & Complete Visa	Article #2 due: Sustainability in India/U.S.
Feb 3	Business	Visa Follow-Up & PowerPoint: Businesses	
Feb 5	Business	Discussion: Sourcing Internationally	Online Discussion: Article #2
Feb 7	Guest Speaker	Guest Speaker: Indian, living in U.S. (in-person)	Activity #5: Guest speaker questions and answers
Feb 10	Government	PowerPoint: Governments and Political Systems Guest Speaker: Visiting India as a foreigner (in-person)	
Feb 12	Guest Speaker		
Feb 14	Government	Prepare for Travel & Discussion: Government	Activity #6: Guest speaker questions and answers
Feb 17	Travel Sites & History of India	Prepare for Travel & PowerPoint: History of India and Travel Sites	
Feb 19	Travel Sites & History of India	Guest Speaker: Indian living in India (zoom)	Activity #7: Guest speaker questions and answers
Feb 21	Travel Sites Research	Prepare Travel & Discussion: Guest Speakers	Article #3 due: Businesses and Gov. in India/U.S.
Feb 24	Guest Speaker	Guest Speaker: Ball State Rinker Center Rep.	
Feb 26			Online Discussion: Article #3

Feb 28	Prepare for Travel –no class Travel – starts on Thursday, 27 th		Journal Part 1: Research on sites visited; questions for speakers.
Mar 3-7	<i>Spring Break Travel</i>		
Mar 10	Rest Day- No Class		
Mar 12	Rest Day –No Class		
Mar 14	Rest Day – No Class		
Mar 17	Globalization	Summary PowerPoint on Topics & Discussion: Reflections on Travel to India - Globalization & Culture	Journal Part 2: Reflections during travel
Mar 19	Culture		
Mar 21	Social Responsibility		Activity #10: Discussion participation
Mar 24	Social Responsibility	Summary PowerPoint on Topics & Discussion: Reflections on Travel to Indi - Social Responsibility and Environmental Sustainability	
Mar 26	Environment		Activity #11: Discussion participation
Mar 28	Finish Scrapbook- Meetings on Presentations, No class		Scrapbook/Blog/Video due: Visuals of Travel Experience
Mar 31	Economic Responsibility	Summary PowerPoint on Topics & Discussion: Reflections on Travel to India - Economic Responsibility and Businesses	
April 2	Business/ Government		Activity #12: Discussion participation
April 4	Meetings on Presentations, No class		Article #5 due: Students select the topic of the article
April 7	Presentation #1	Students present on a topic that relates to their major. Presentations included an engagement activity or discussion questions.	Online Discussion: Article #5
April 9	Presentation #2		
Apr. 11	Presentation #3		Activity #13: Discussion participation
Apr. 14	Presentation #4		
Apr. 16	Presentation #5		
Apr. 18	Presentation #6		Activity #14: Discussion participation
Apr. 21	Presentation #7		
Apr. 23	Presentation #8		
Apr. 25	Presentation #9		

Apr.28	Presentation #10	Final thoughts and class conclusion.	Activity #15: Discussion Participation
Finals Week	Friday 7:30-9:30	Available in the classroom to meet about grades, etc.	

ⁱ A structured journal template and detailed assignment descriptions are available upon request.
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