Diversity and Identity Abroad

The Pitzer College Office of Study Abroad and International Services is committed to diversity and supports the participation of students representing different groups based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, ability, nationality, and religion. In addition to the educational, travel, health and safety, and adjustment issues facing all international travelers, many students may have additional identity-related considerations when deciding whether, where, and how to take advantage of study abroad opportunities.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term introduced to the academy by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe the confluence of an individual’s multiple social identities in shaping who they are. These social identities include race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, ability, religion, etc. This concept provides a working theoretical framework in intercultural understanding as it helps in understanding positionality, power, oppression and social justice. Dr. Crenshaw has several videos on YouTube where she expands this concept, and below are a couple of shorter synopses and an article of what the concept entails.

Intersectionality 101 by Teaching Tolerance  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6dnj2lyYjE

Intro to Intersectionality by Taryn Crenshaw  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWeDatP0cv4

Intersectionality 101 by Olena Hankivsky, PhD  
https://studylib.net/doc/10714281/intersectionality-101-olena-hankivsky--phd

Consider How Your Identity Can Impact Your Safety Abroad

Your various identities will influence your study abroad experience. Depending on how you identify, you may experience study abroad differently from your peers of other identities. This doesn’t necessarily mean that you’ll have negative experiences, but we know students from certain identity backgrounds, particularly students of color, women, LGBTQIA+ students and those of certain religious backgrounds, are more prone to face incidents related to their identity abroad. Therefore, it is important to know what the experience is like in-country for people who share your identity and make sure it’s safe. Doing this research ahead of time will help you choose a location that suites your comfortability level and will help you better navigate various experiences while abroad. We encourage you to consult the articles and resources included and invite students to discuss questions and concerns with the Office of Study Abroad.
Race, culture, and ethnicity may present both challenges and opportunities abroad in terms of host country attitudes toward racial issues. Many students find differing levels of sensitivity in the host country difficult – in some cultures, it is common to give individuals nicknames based on physical characteristics such as weight, hair color/texture, and skin color. This habit can be disconcerting for those from the U.S., but is often not meant to be offensive, and can even be intended as a term of endearment.

Studying abroad can represent an opportunity to act as a cultural ambassador and to educate host nationals about cultural groups within the United States; there is often great interest in other countries in the history and culture of African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinx. This interest presents great opportunities for conversations regarding your culture(s), media stereotypes, and diversity issues within your host country.

Alongside those opportunities, some students might also

- be essentialized/tokenized as representatives of their racial/ethnic group beyond being put on the spot for their U.S. nationality (e.g., "What do [all] Latinos in the U.S. think about your immigration policies?" Or, "When did you immigrate to the U.S.?" OR, "You speak English very well!")
- be exoticized or stereotyped based on American media portrayals (e.g., expectations of Native American dress, names, technological awareness, or living arrangements based entirely on old Western movies)
- be expected to be highly critical of the U.S. or experts in the experiences of their ancestral homelands (e.g., Native American students expected to hate U.S. for its treatment of their people, third generation Japanese-American quizzed on anime, or African-Americans expected to have detailed knowledge of contemporary African conflicts).

While some students choose study abroad destinations where there are very few persons of color, others might choose countries where communities of color make up the majority. Some students may be interested in “heritage seeking” and will opt to study in a location connected to their religious, linguistic, national, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds. These types of locations present a different set of possibilities and may also include unexpected challenges. For example, community members may have high expectations regarding the cultural knowledge and linguistic capabilities of heritage seeking students.

Regardless of your study abroad destination, you may find that your salient identities shift while abroad. Some students find that they are first viewed as a U.S. citizen rather than a person of the racial, ethnic, or cultural group they identify with, and this can provide an interesting opportunity to explore how these aspects of self intersect. Staying connected with other students from your similar identity who are also abroad can help you process and reflect on your experience as it happens.

Researching your host country in advance can provide a better understanding of potential attitudes towards race and ethnicity in general and your own identities specifically.

Get ready for your adventure! Studying abroad provides an excellent opportunity to learn about world cultures as well as your own. As an LGBTQ student you may have additional things to consider before departure. Preparing for what to expect in any particular country can make the difference between a wonderful experience abroad and a more challenging one.

You may already identify as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, or queer student, or you may still be exploring your identity. In either case, you will find that the social climate, laws, and personal interactions of other cultures will often differ from the U.S. In preparing for departure, all students should reflect on cultural ideas of gender identity/expression and sexual identity both in the U.S. and in the host country. Consider carefully how your identity as a LGBTQ person coming from the U.S. may influence your relationships with host nationals, your cultural adjustment, and your overall education abroad experience.

- Learning More about Your Host Country Before You Depart
- Questions to Ask
- Legal Issues to Consider Before Going Abroad
- Internet Resources

Learning More about Your Host Country Before You Depart
In some cultures, Western understandings of “gay” and “straight” don’t exist, or don’t carry the same importance as they do in the U.S. People involved in same-sex relationships or who don’t identify with their gender assigned at birth may not see being Queer and/or Trans as personal/cultural identity. In other cultures, understandings of LGBTQ identity may be similar to our understandings in the U.S. In preparing for your study abroad experience, it is important for you to research the LGBTQ culture and political climate of the country you will be visiting.

If you are open about your gender and/or sexual identity, consider the following as you research potential study abroad countries:

- Moving through the world as a queer person may be significantly different in your host country. How will you navigate your experience if you feel less safe than expected?
- If queer/trans people in your host country navigate being queer/trans differently than in the U.S. – how will you adjust to that shift – especially if that difference is due to safety concerns?
- Identify supportive people or places both in the U.S. and on the ground in your host country before leaving. If you need support while abroad, it can help to know who to reach out to in advance.

If you are not open about your gender and/or sexual identity, along with the above, consider the following as you research potential study abroad countries:

- In some countries you may find it easier to come out; make sure that you have a support network during this time. If you choose to come out while abroad, consider how this will affect your return to friends and family.
- If you are not public about your identity, realize that finding that community will be a bit more difficult while abroad. Finding groups or organizations before you go is essential. Check out the links in the campus and international resources sections.

Questions to Ask
As part of your pre-departure preparations, ask these questions of yourself, your study abroad adviser, and your study abroad program.

- Does your right to be LGBTQ in the United States conflict with your host country’s religious or cultural values and traditions?
- How will you reconcile your human rights with the cultural values of your host society?
- Will your (LGBT) legal rights be similar or different from the United States?
- How will you work to understand your privilege as a college student from the U.S. in your host culture?
- Are there safety considerations that you should be aware of?
- How do gender relations operate in the host culture?
- What is considered typical gendered behavior in the host culture?
• What is the social perception of members of the LGBTQ community?
• What roles do trans people play in the host culture?
• Is there a gender binary in the host culture? What do the lives of folks outside the binary look like?
• Does your study abroad program offer LGBTQ friendly housing?
• Does your study abroad program discuss LGBTQ considerations during their orientation?
• What are my safety needs and perceptions, and how can they best be met? Is the program able to make special accommodations for students who request single rooms, private baths, or certain roommates?
• Research how you may be received in your host country thinking about gender/sexuality/race/class. Is this perception something you feel comfortable with?
• Will I need access to any medications, supplies, or services due to my transgender status? Are they available in my host country? If not, will I need any additional documentation to travel with my medication or supplies?

Get to Know Your Destination
Explore LGBTQ travel guides and internet resources. Talk with other LGBTQ and allied people about their experiences in certain countries or regions to gather as much information as possible upon which to make your choices and decisions. Once in your host country, find out what local newspapers, e-magazines or online resources may be available. Some questions to ask include:

• How open will I be about my sexual orientation and gender identity with my teachers, peers, friends, host family and others?
• How important is it to me to find other sexual minority students and friends while abroad? How will I make connections with other sexual minority students, local residents, or community organizations and gathering places?
• What resources are available in my host country for sexual minority people?
• Are there any LGBT-friendly establishments nearby? How can I find them?

Legal Issues to Consider Before Going Abroad
The laws governing LGBTQ relationships and sexual activity differ from country to country. U.S. citizens must abide by the laws of a host country; knowing these laws may help you to decide what countries you might like to visit if you will be out abroad or if you will pursue relationships while abroad. Even if you do not plan to have a sexual relationship while away, you should be informed about specific laws pertaining to sexual behavior and sexual/gender identity. When doing your research, try to ascertain:

• Are there “public decency” laws? Or “public indecency” laws?
• The legality of same-sex sexual behavior (sometimes male-male sexual behavior is illegal while female-female sexual behavior is not), including sodomy laws.
• The age of consent for sexual behavior (which may differ from the age of consent for opposite-sex sexual behavior)
• Restrictions on freedom of association or expression for LGBTQ people
• Anti-discrimination laws (these can be national laws or specific to local areas)
You may find that you can be more open about your identity than in the U.S., or that you would need to hide your sexual or gender identity completely to avoid cultural ostracism or arrest. Understanding this will help you decide where you would, or would not, want to study.

Internet Resources
The following links are a good place to start answering some of the questions posed above. We have tips for LGBTQ travelers provided by governmental organizations, advocacy groups, and other universities. Please note that although much of the information available on the internet claims to discuss LGBTQ experiences internationally, many do not focus on the needs and concerns of gender minoritized folks. Therefore, not all of the resources listed below touch on experiences of trans* and other gender minoritized folks. However, The QRC is always improving our resources and strives to serve the LGBTQQQIAA community as best we can. If you know of a good resource for LGBTQ students studying abroad, please contact The QRC Staff with your recommendations.
Resources for LGBTQ Travelers
US State Department Traveler’s Checklist: useful checklist for all travelers departing from the United States
LGBT Student Guide for Education Abroad: a 34-page resource including links to international LGBTQ organizations and a country-by-country description of LGBTQ concerns including legal and cultural climate around LGBTQ status, presence/visibility of LGBTQ communities, and national LGBTQ organizations and resources
Meaningful Travel Tips and Tales: LGBTQ traveler’s perspectives: A resource dedicated to helping LGBTQ travelers prepare to go abroad and feel more comfortable when they get there. Written by and for queer people.
Transgender and TSA: travel tips for trans* folks with an explanation of TSA policies and resources
National Center for Transgender Equality Know Your Rights: Airport Security

Resources for Travelers with Disabilities
Mobility International USA: provides information for travelers from the United States, as well as visitors to the U.S such as an a-z disability resource list, tips on preparing to travel, and opportunities to learn about global disability culture

College Study Abroad Offices – LGBTQ Resources
NAFSA Association of International Educators: Rainbow Special Interest Group
Ithaca College – LGBT Students and Study Abroad
Michigan State – Information for LGBTQ Students
NYU Student to Student Guide – LGBT
University of Minnesota – (video) “Orientation for GLBT Students Studying Abroad”
William & Mary College – LGBT

Diversity Note
Beloit College – Diversity and Identity Abroad: a useful discussion and list of resources related to intersectional navigation of an international experience.
IFSA-Butler — Unpacked: Unpacked is a new online study abroad guide for students by students, where one section is dedicated to LGBTQIA+ students.

LGBTI human rights
F&M Global Barometers measure the LGBTI human rights in 203 countries and regions.

Queer Resource Center of the Claremont Colleges. “Study Abroad”. Community Resources. Accessed October 27, 2022
https://colleges.claremont.edu/qrc/resources/community-resources/study-abroad/
Being a woman abroad can be an eye-opening experience, because every culture has a different attitude towards women. Before and during your trip, find out about your host country’s cultural values and behaviors regarding women.

Across many countries, traditional gender roles often inform how women are expected to act, dress, and even speak to others. What might be perceived as common behavior for women in the U.S. may be misinterpreted in other countries. For example, how does religion play a role in how women are expected to dress? Can smiling or making direct eye contact with strangers imply something more than just a friendly gesture? If men stare and catcall while you walk down the street, how do you react?

Sometimes, what is considered "acceptable behavior" for women in the U.S. has sexual connotations in other cultures, so it's important to talk with other women who have been to your host country to know what type of behavior is most culturally appropriate.

You will also want to find out what the local attitudes are towards American women. There is a preconception abroad that American women are “easy” or “loose.” If you are thinking about being sexually active abroad, inform yourself about STD prevention, birth control, and safe sex practices in that country. In addition, how is sex outside of marriage perceived? Do the locals shun women who have sex outside of marriage?

You may become frustrated with local behaviors and attitudes towards women, especially if you feel it prevents you from being yourself. This is understandable when experiencing another culture. To avoid unwanted attention, dress and act like the local women. This can be a great opportunity to befriend local women to learn directly from them about ways to dress or act as they do.

Throughout your trip, remember to put your safety first and always be aware of your surroundings. By observing the locals, you’ll learn about gender roles in another culture. You can also use resources like our Diversity Abroad Destination Guides to help you prepare for your experience abroad.

**Must Ask Questions for Women:**
- Is it safe for me to go out alone? at night? Are there areas or places I should avoid?
- How are women expected to behave?
- How do men treat women?
- What are the cultural norms regarding friendship and dating?
- Do people in my host country have stereotypes of American women?

**Tips for Women:**
- Do research on gender roles and their history beforehand.
- Put your safety first and be aware of your surroundings.
- Dress and act like the local women to avoid standing out.
- Be aware of cultural differences, including body language, that may be misinterpreted in your host culture. Talk with other women who have studied abroad to find out more about their experiences.

[https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/women-going-abroad](https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/women-going-abroad)
ACCESSIBILITY ABROAD

Pre-Departure Preparations: Tips from Students

How Accommodations Can Differ
Because the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is an U.S. law which does not have jurisdiction in other countries, students may find that disabilities accommodations are the same, better or worse in their study abroad destination.

- Disability Resource Services, as a student support service, may not be provided at your host institution.
- Attitudes around accommodations may be different in your host country.
- Tutoring may not be a free service at the host university.
- To obtain a visa, some countries require health information, which can delay the process.
- Electricity for equipment or recharging batteries often requires adapters and/or converters.
- Learning disabilities may not be recognized in some countries.
- Sign language interpreters may not be certified or available at all times, and interpreting will generally be in the sign language of the country rather than ASL.
- Some countries quarantine guide dogs before they are allowed into the country.
- Bring mobility aids to use in restrooms without bars or on long train platforms.
- Carry extra spare parts or differing types of casters for a wheelchair.

Medical/Prescription Needs

- If you take prescriptions, make sure you have enough to last throughout the entire stay.
- All medications should be stored in their original containers with their label attached and visible.
- Carry a letter from a physician that describes the medication.
- Always carry medication in your carry-on in the event your checked bag is delayed or lost.
- It is illegal to have medication sent abroad to you via postal mail.
- Confirm your health insurance covers any disability-related medical needs while overseas.
- Ensure your medication is legal in your host country by contacting the consulate or embassy.
- The University of Minnesota requires students maintain their US health insurance whenever enrolled, including while learning abroad. Learn more.

Coping Strategies

- Work early on with your home institution to arrange accommodations at your overseas site.
- Learn to explain your disability in the host language.
- Read about students with disabilities who have been abroad in order to learn from their experiences.
- Your disability may intersect with your host culture in unexpected ways. It is important to research your host culture before you go, discuss customs with your hosts, and be open to creative solutions.
- Once abroad, on-site staff can help connect you with a student who has a similar disability.
- If your home institution does not offer a list of mentors, contact Mobility International USA.
Religion and culture are intertwined in many countries around the world and studying abroad provides a unique opportunity to learn about world religions and the role they play in different cultures.

Exposure to different belief systems while living and studying abroad may prompt questions about your religious identity and may cause you to reflect more about your religious or spiritual practice. Research about religious life in your host country before you go abroad, and while abroad, keep an open mind about religious practices. In doing this, you'll be able to gain a better understanding of your own belief system(s) and an increased familiarity of those of others.

**Things to Consider**

Will you be part of a religious majority or a religious minority abroad?

If you are planning to practice your religion abroad, are there any places of worship you can visit? If not, how will you plan to practice your religion?

How tolerant is your host country about religion and spirituality? How are atheists or agnostics perceived? Will it be safe for you to wear religious symbols and/or clothing?

Is there separation of church and state in your host country? Are there laws about religion?

If you have religious dietary restrictions, will they be accommodated in your host country?

If you are living in a homestay, are you open to living in a household with a different religious background than yours?

Are there any religious holidays that are celebrated as public events in your host country?

Are there any places of worship that you will be able to visit, as part of your study abroad program or on your own?

What do you need to know before visiting (such as dress code, etc.)?
As a first-generation college student, your focus on college may be to simply navigate what it means to be successful in college. There's a good chance that going abroad was never part of your vision for what this success looks like, and that's okay. However, there are so many benefits to studying abroad that will ultimately make you a stronger candidate for opportunities after you graduate. In preparing for study abroad, here are a few tips to help you successfully navigate the process:

**Talk to Your Advisors and Fellow Students:** When preparing to study abroad, seek advice from people at your current university or college. First, make appointments to speak with your advisors, specifically in study abroad, academic advising and financial aid. If you have a study abroad office at your campus, make an appointment to talk with them and fully understand what programs are available to you. You should also connect with your academic advisors to figure out which courses enable you to earn credits towards your major or degree. And of course, make an appointment to talk with the financial aid office. Doing this will help you realize how much of your financial aid package can be used to go abroad, which will determine how much you may be expected to pay out of pocket.

In addition, talk to students who have already studied abroad. They can give you firsthand advice about the process of living abroad, and will give you the most truthful answers you could want. If you don’t know anyone who has studied abroad, ask your advisors to connect you with someone who has recently gone abroad through your campus. You can also use the Diversity Abroad Community Forums to post any questions you have, or read our Alumni Stories to find a student whose identities and experiences mirror yours.

**Do Your Research:** Do as much research as possible. Speaking with advisors and other study abroad alumni is a great start, but take the time to look into your options to ensure you make the best decision. DiversityAbroad.com Destination Guides are a great resource where you can start learning about opportunities, best practices, and better understand what your experience abroad may be like.

**Find Support:** Making the decision to go abroad, especially if no one you know before you has done it, can be daunting. Your family and friends may not understand your motivations, or may even think it's a "vacation"! It's important to find people in your life who support your decision to go abroad, whether that support comes from friends, family, mentors, or even other students in your study abroad cohort. Having people in your life who understand and respect your decision to go abroad can help you feel more comfortable, and can help you ease into your study abroad program more smoothly.

Additional Resources:

FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR
https://www.state.gov/courses/answeringdifficultquestions/html/app.htm?p=module1_p1.htm
https://umabroad.umn.edu/resources/identity/students-of-color/experiences
https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/managing-black-hair-abroad
https://geneseo.edu/study_abroad/asian-americanpacific-islander-students-abroad
https://hnmagazine.com/2017/04/10-reasons-hispanic-american-students-study-abroad/
https://www.goabroad.com/articles/study-abroad/students-of-color-study-abroad
https://www.goabroad.com/articles/study-abroad/black-students-travel-guide
https://global.umich.edu/travel-resources/identities-abroad/

FOR LGBTQIA STUDENTS
https://umabroad.umn.edu/resources/identity/lgbtqia
http://www.rainbowsig.org/

FOR DACA STUDENTS
https://www.nafsa.org/professional-resources/browse-by-interest/daca-resource-page-international-student-advisers-and-education-abroad-advisers

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY ABROAD
https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/religious-diversity-abroad
http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/
https://pluralism.org/home
https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-reports/

ACCESSIBILITY & DISABILITIES ABROAD
https://www.miusa.org/ncde/
https://umabroad.umn.edu/resources/identity/disabilities
https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/health/your-health-abroad.html

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS ABROAD
https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/first-generation-students-traveling-abroad
https://firstgen.naspa.org/blog/adventure-is-where-belonging-began-my-first-generation-study-abroad-experience
https://global.umich.edu/travel-resources/identities-abroad/first-generation-abroad/