



Designing Your Course

Contents (click items below to jump down document)

DESIGNING YOUR COURSE.....	2
1. Guidance on Course Development	2
A. Benefits for Students	2
B. The Purpose of a Study Abroad Course	2
C. Facilitating Learning Abroad	3
D. Designing a Course	3
E. Designing an Itinerary	8
F. On-Site Course Management.....	9
G. Lessons Learned.....	10
2. Contacting the CCSA Office	11

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DESIGNING YOUR COURSE

This section is focused on designing your course that you plan to propose. It is more detailed and guides you deeper into the planning and development process. When you're ready to propose a course, then Part 2 is designed to help you along the way.

1. Guidance on Course Development

Remember.... Your location IS your classroom.

CCSA programs are built on a set of courses that may or may not have obvious connections. However, each course syllabi requires students to participate in course-specific activities that may be stand-alone and separate from other courses OR may be conducted in coordination with several courses.

Depending on which CCSA program you have been approved to teach, there may be a great deal of group activities already built into the program schedule. This is true particularly for the Belize, Australia, and Ireland programs, since CCSA has to settle on costs of these activities before being able to set the program prices posted in our promotional materials. By contrast, CCSA's London-based programs typically have fewer structured group activities, which gives instructors in those programs more latitude for developing individualized class itineraries.

A. Benefits for Students

Students seek international learning opportunities for a variety of reasons that include, but are not limited to:

- increase in student willingness to take courses outside of their major area of study,
- increased confidence with ambiguity and new experiences,
- increased interest in interdisciplinary studies,
- increased skills of inter-cultural communication,
- greater comparative understandings of social issues,
- a higher level understanding of social change, and
- a greater understanding of inequalities and differences both near and far.

B. The Purpose of a Study Abroad Course

Study abroad courses must meet all the academic requirements of any other college-level course. Academics come first, and your course is expected to integrate the location into the syllabus. Your aim should be to infuse every lesson with the culture, history, or significance of your location.

Consider the following as you begin to plan your program:

- How can the class be taught abroad differently than in a traditional campus classroom?

Students report wanting to learn more about culture *before* the start of the course.

- Include photos in your materials you send to students before your program departs.
- Talk about the country and culture in your class discussions using local vocabulary whenever possible.
- Provide required reading that will familiarize students with the program destination(s) in advance; travel guides, blogs, forums, and academic readings may be useful.

- How is the course connected to the location? If it is not, are you willing to modify the course or the location?
- How can study abroad enhance the goals of experiential education?

Experiential education infuses direct experience with learning; its aim is to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop students' capacity to contribute to their communities.

C. Facilitating Learning Abroad

The CCSA team provides years of experience in developing, leading and assessing study abroad courses. CCSA programs are a shared responsibility and your primary task is to design and teach the best course possible. The CCSA team's task is to provide the administrative support you need to teach the course you've designed.

From the years of expertise at your disposal, these proven practices are important to consider as you design your course:

- Being an on-site instructor does not require complete understanding of the host culture. You should be willing to discover together with the students, willing to learn, prepared to give up your own stereotypes and discomfort, and be willing to admit when you don't know the answer. Searching for answers together can create a positive learning experience for all involved.
- Many, if not all, of your students will be visiting your program destination for the first time. Take advantage of their fresh perspective, and be aware that students will notice many aspects of the culture or location of which you are already aware. Students will be surprised by aspects of the culture that you very much take for granted; allow them to have authentic learning moments without offering too much. Do not spoon-feed to students what they potentially can learn on their own.
- Never forget that cultures are not monolithic. The Ireland you visited 3 years ago may not be the Ireland you will visit this year with your students. Anticipate and welcome changes. Can you embrace and cultural changes and incorporate them into your syllabus?



D. Designing a Course

1. Term of Course. A CCSA experience may follow an alternate schedule that impacts your course design.

- **Standard.** A summer or winter course normally for 3 credit hours conducted between May and August or in December to January, respectively. For CCSA's winter programs, some member schools reward the credit for spring semester class., while a few do offer a winter

term option (ex. WKU conducts a three-week Winter Term in January). Check with your campus rep and education abroad office to make sure how your campus awards credit.

- **Semester extended 3+.** A semester course for 3 credit hours PLUS 3 credit hours in summer or winter that may be a continuation or extension of the semester as an optional 3-credit hour course. Since your students may be from another school, the pre-requisites need to be clearly stated in your course proposal and all documentation available for students.

2. **Adapting an Existing Course.** Do not expect to recycle an existing course on another continent. You must redesign the course with the international location in mind. Consider the hands-on activities that relate to your content and how you expand upon those with the resources available in your location.

The following are proven practices to adapt a current course to a new location:

- Alter or add to the current course objectives to reflect the location,
- Make sure your objectives clearly address the international nature of the course, and
- Ensure your course is connected so intricately with the location that the course and location could not be extricated from each other.

3. **Designing a New Course.** Consider designing a new course for your international location. This enables you to differentiate your course from other options, which in turn improves recruiting potential. These courses can be fully focused on the location. When designing a new course, your class assignments will likely differ from those expected in on-campus courses.

Make sure to follow your institution's process for course approval to assure your students may earn the credit you intend.

4. **Course Level.** An important consideration is the level you wish to teach your course. The options are undergraduate – lower division, undergraduate – upper division, or graduate level. Another designation may be an Honors section within the undergraduate level. If you plan to teach multiple levels, you'll need to clearly differentiate the syllabi for each level. These differentiations will be stated in the course proposal although only the designation of UG or GR is required at the course proposal step. After your course is approved, you may differentiate lower and upper division as needed by your home campus course approval process.

Honors Section

If your campus provides a means to offer Honors credit, please describe below along with how you will differentiate the Honors section from the course described in #13 above.

If your campus doesn't offer Honors sections of your standard undergraduate classes, you may use WKU's guide. WKU designates Honors sections as Honors Enriched and Embedded Courses (HEECs) that are described at this link: <https://www.wku.edu/honors/faculty/resources.php>.

If you choose to propose an Honors section, you must differentiate it from a non-Honors through "additional assignments, more sophisticated assignments, more sophisticated course material, oral presentations, different methods of grading, special trips or activities, group work, or even special meetings with the professor outside of the scheduled class times (such as

scheduled discussion groups).” While this definition may fit any well-designed study abroad class, you still need to differentiate the Honors section.

An example may be to add an extended assignment that your students complete “after” the on-site portion of your course. This could follow the “bring it home” concept in which students actively compare something they learned in the foreign location with their home town or home campus. Public transportation or infrastructure. Access to public services. Food. These are examples of things your students may research or discuss with people on the local level to compare with people they met in the international location. The methods may vary, but interviews or physical documents (photos) may be ways for your students research the differences (and similarities) that they then present to the entire class. There are hundreds of ways for your students to complete the assignments, but you need to differentiate the Honors section from the non-Honor section here and in your syllabi.

CCSA will create an Honor section for students who need a WKU transcript.

5. Unique Aspects of a Study Abroad Course

Experiential learning is a study abroad format that requires different activities and planning than any other course you’d teach on campus.

Key Factors that promote successful short-term, study abroad courses include (1) academic rigor, (2) multiple teaching methods, and (2) facilitated reflection by students. According to Lori Gardinier and Dawn Colquitt-Anderson, “There is no formula for the percentage of time that should be spent in formal class time, seeing cultural/historical sites and events, doing field work, or engaging in peer-to-peer cultural exchange. Regardless of the mix, students should arrive at the destination with a grounding in both the academic and cultural context through a combination of pre-departure lectures, guided research, online discussions, readings, and cultural events relevant to the trip.” (Gardinier, Lori, and Dawn Colquitt-Anderson. “Learning Abroad.” in *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. no. 124, Winter 2010.)

Your syllabus should address these types of activities:

- A. The concept to “**know before you go**” makes the on-site portion more effective. CCSA encourages faculty to create reading assignments that are due when the program starts -- and minimize the amount of reading while overseas. Giving a quiz on required reading during the first on-site class or having a written assignment based on the reading due on arrival are ways that many CCSA instructors have used to insure that students have already done significant reading for the class before departure and hence are ready to appreciate fully the on-site class activities.
- B. **Before and After Program** activities must be taken into account when planning your course. In programs in which that grading schedule allows for it, leaving major writing assignments to the post-program period before grades are due is also recommended. You might want to include in your syllabus a reminder that the full academic experience of a study abroad course involves more than just the time spent on the travel portion of the program; pre-program reading and post-program writing are key aspects of mastering the course material and of insuring that participants will maximize the impact of the on-site experiential learning overseas.

- C. Traditional classroom activities** may include lectures, discussions, group activities, and in-class writing, during the instructional times listed in the program itinerary. Appropriate rooms in the hotel or dormitory in which you stay will be provided by CCSA, but partly since the cost of such room usage may sometimes be quite high and partly because CCSA believes that most study abroad learning should be taking place outside the traditional classroom setting and instead out in the learning environments unique to your overseas site, you should try to minimize such traditional classroom activities. Depending on which CCSA program you are in, the times that are available for such activities may be flexible or limited (e.g. in the four-week London Summer program there is a structured schedule to insure that students taking two classes don't end up with time conflicts). Check with the CCSA staff about how sophisticated the technology may or may not be in the particular teaching sites available on your program; there may be situations where you won't have smart classroom set-ups and students will have no alternative to writing out class assignments, etc. in longhand. Remember that experiential on-site learning should be the central feature of study abroad classes, and participants did not come all the way to the program to sit in classrooms like on their home campus for more than the minimally relevant time.
- D. Attendance** is essential, but faculty may count it toward the grade in varying ways. A proven range tends to be 10 – 15%. This enables students who cannot make it to class for legitimate (often illness) reasons aren't overly penalized.
- E. Organized group activities involving all classes**, such as initial on-site orientation meetings and city bus tours upon arrival in locales where programs will be present for prolonged periods (e.g. London or Dublin). There are also day-long excursions that CCSA plans for all participants (e.g. excursions to Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick and to Dover and Canterbury in the London Winter programs). All faculty and participants are expected to take part in these group activities, which are clearly delineated in the program itinerary that you will receive.
- Also, CCSA's Faculty Advisor Group allows you to bounce your field trip ideas off veteran CCSA teachers who have volunteered to provide advice about specific CCSA sites with which they are very familiar. [Learn more at this link](#). The link to the Group is through CCSA's Academic Director, Jeffrey Williams (williamsj@nku.edu); don't hesitate to take advantage of the accumulated expertise of the Group.
- F. Field trips** to sites appropriate to your course content. These are the heart of a typical CCSA class, and we encourage you to strive to find the most meaningful and impressive kinds of field trip activities to engage and challenge your students. It will be this aspect of your class that students will remember longest and which will likely provide the deepest learning experience.

First-time study abroad teachers are often are overly ambitious in their field trip plans, trying to pack too many activities into the time available; alternatively first-timers are too cautious and schedule too little. Getting the balance just right comes with experience, so we recommend that you seek out the advice of colleagues on your own campus who have taught on study abroad programs and may have ideas about what is practicable and feasible.

Successful instructors almost always piggy-back mini-lectures and spontaneous discussions onto field trips, by taking advantage of time spent on public transportation or in CCSA coaches. This enables student to vocalize what was observed or learned at its freshest.

To paraphrase long-time CCSA Executive Director Mike Klembara: “Tell them what they are going to see, tell them what they’re seeing, and get them to tell you what they just saw!”

- G.** The time students spend on **course-related and self-directed activities** is essential. Reading required materials, writing journal entries, perhaps doing research on their own for your class must be included while not burdening students during the on-site portion of your course. Obviously, in a short overseas program when students are going to be investing time in sightseeing on their own, sampling the local culture, etc., you cannot require them to do the amount of “homework” that you would back on your home campus. Expecting students to read a long novel by Dickens or a thick tome on international economics while on-site is not realistic, especially for CCSA’s shorter programs.

- H. Explore time** is a way that CCSA courses encourage students to use their personal time effectively as well. There is never any “free” time on a short-term program, so explore time is the unscheduled time when students experience their location and travel independently. Since CCSA courses tend to be very intense, faculty should encourage their students to explore with an eye toward their course content. Economics students may travel to Paris for a long weekend, but could also report back to the class on things they experience or observe from an economics perspective. Students in health care courses who travel to Scotland can report back on what they observed or experienced as well. This “outside the classroom” undirected, yet guided learning, often proves to be very important in the learning achievement of students. All it requires of faculty is time to discuss before and after the students do what they plan to do anyway: see as much as they can in the shorts possible time.



6. Designing Assignments around Program Activities

- Pre-Departure
 - Assign students to research specific sites/activities that they present in-class or on-site, and
 - Guide students regarding the connections you hope they will draw.
- On-Site
 - Take a few minutes before each activity to remind students of why the activity matters,
 - Debrief at a site after an activity while it is still fresh in students’ minds, and
 - Encourage written or photo-journaling so students can organize their thoughts more effectively after leaving a site.
- Post Program
 - The course need not end upon return. The final assignments may be better if you give your students a few weeks to complete them.

For the London Summer 4-week program, grades are due at the end of program.

7. Counting Program Activities in Your Course Assessment

Include any activities you plan to grade or assess in your syllabus. Make sure attendance in program activities is required, appropriate, and specified in the syllabus.

Graded activities might include, but are not limited to:

- Writing activities
 - Research about what students will see,
 - Reflections on what students saw, and
 - Comparative studies.
- Presentations
- Journaling and Reflection
- Final project – may be due after return (London Summer exception)
- Explore Time - Consider assigning students to turn in a top 10 list of what they'll do in their explore time as an un-graded, or bonus, assignment. It will encourage them to think about how they will spend their time in your location.

Reflection writing is one of the single-most important learning techniques in a study abroad course. It is more effective when guided (i.e. through faculty directed questions) and embedded in course expectations.

A study abroad courses offer 24/7 learning opportunities therefore “free time” downplays the academic focus of all activities. Not every minute needs to be crammed with official course activities but effective courses build in the expectation that student will apply their learning to everything they do while in country. Hence the importance of including **opportunities for personal growth and improved cultural awareness** as learning goals.

8. Meeting Course Objectives

- How will you meet your objectives in a limited amount of time? Your on-site activities should all be content-based.
- Plan readings strategically; leave students time to connect the readings to their experiences.
- Know where you're going academically and geographically—map out your course. Bring printed maps whenever possible; access via a smartphone may be available but expensive on-site.

E. Designing an Itinerary

First-time faculty report regrets over their lack of logistical research, and these proven practices improve courses.

- Research the sites you will visit and decide how they will be integrated into your syllabus. Don't add locations or activities without considering how they will reflect the content and how the content will reflect them.
- Communicate with the Faculty Advisory Group for discipline and location expertise. [Here is link.](#)
- Search for study abroad programs in your field, and see what others are doing with their courses abroad.
 - Request itineraries, location information, related texts or assignments.
 - Ask for things and places to avoid.
 - Your colleagues may also help recruit from their students.
- Infuse traditional tourist sites with academic content.
- How do your chosen texts relate to specific sites?
- What assignments will you create based on site visits?
- How can you make a traditional site connect to your course? **Example:** The London Bridge Tower is relevant to...
 - **History.** Effect on integration of classes,
 - **Economics.** Effect on trade and finance for regions previously separated,
 - **Health.** Through trade diseases were transported more easily with the bridge,
 - **Occupational Safety.** Conditions through the building of the bridge,
 - **Engineering.** Design of and choice of design, or
 - **Accounting.** Usage of trade and finance as reasoning for build, tracking of funding throughout build, ethical use of funds

F. On-Site Course Management

- Students will need time to acclimate to the location. Can you provide activities or guidance that will introduce them to the location?
- Incorporate some down-time for reflection and to recharge. You will need it too.
- Don't over-pack your suitcase or your schedule. A learning goal may be for your students to feel confident enough to come back to the location on their own and see all those things you could not include in your course.
- Build a community of scholars learning together and looking out for each other.
- Model the behaviors that you want your students to follow.
 - Follow local customs as appropriate.
 - Research and share pertinent information with your students as early as possible.
 - Students willfully ignoring cultural norms may affect the learning outcomes of your course. Make them aware of those norms and make it clear to students that they are to be followed when appropriate.
 - Do not interrupt guides; utilize them as the valuable resource they are.
- Make time to meet with guides, your colleagues, and other key players every day. Debrief at night and/or meet in the morning before departure.

- Anticipate delays and cancellations. Prepare a Plan B for every location or activity, even if Plan B is an impromptu discussion with students on the bus. Don't be afraid to revisit and redesign on the fly as needed if a site or activity is not benefiting students in the way you had hoped.

"The best laid plans..." can and do go awry.
Is flexibility and adaptability in your toolkit?

- Give students clear expectations *in the syllabus* about participation in meals, site visits, and other activities.
- Communicate with **all participants** at regular intervals rather than telling a few about plans and expect everyone to get the information. Use meals as class or logistical meeting time, but don't surprise students with last minute changes to expectations.
- Debrief with your program administrator and with students.

As you develop your ideas for class activities for CCSA programs in Ireland, Australia, and Belize, you may request some alterations to the itinerary as it was initially constructed by CCSA. It may be possible to fine-tune the group itinerary to accommodate your desire to visit specific sites not yet included in the initial itinerary (which was put together before CCSA knew which classes would make the minimum participation level). In other words, the itineraries for those programs are works-in-progress until the instructors for the courses have worked out with CCSA what the best itinerary is to accommodate as much as possible the various requests that have been made.

But remember, the more expense items you pack into your specific class, the more your students pay. Just as students pay different amounts for more books for campus classes, students in specific classes pay different amounts for different classes. Theatre courses require tickets to see shows. Other classes may need to pay for admission to costly sites. Think about low-cost or no-cost alternatives that meet your learning goals in order to keep courses affordable.



G. Lessons Learned

Here are some suggestions for study abroad learning experiences that veteran CCSA instructors have used to good effect:

- The organized group activities for all classes that are included in your program (such as city bus tours on arrival) are mainly orientation expeditions. You can get your class participants to be thinking about how what they are seeing fits into an aspect of your class. Ahead of the group

activity identify some themes from your class that might be relevant to the group activity and ask your students to keep those themes in mind.

- Think about organizing small group activities that get students out on research projects and provide class time for them to report back to the rest of the class on their findings. Or if time allows, you may organize similar individual research projects. In both cases, think of non-library, non-internet-based research that involves personal experiential research, such as interviewing of locals, observation of places, architecture, cultural events, etc. – **research that can only be done on-site** and which couldn't be duplicated through normal research methods.
- Use guidebooks and the web to find off-the-beaten-track institutions, museums, historic sites, public events, etc. in your program site that relate to your course. Also, if you are a member of a professional organization related to your class content, you may be able to connect with local experts in your field who could provide advice or perhaps even a guest lecture or a visit to a relevant site that you couldn't easily access as a member of the general public. Remember to always bring it back to your class and your instruction.
- Getting your students involved in the selection of field trip sites forces them to learn ahead of time about potential learning sites. In the pre-departure phase, provide them with a list of possible sites to visit and ask them to select one or two that seem especially attractive or relevant to their interests and then have them write a defense of why the class should go there as opposed to the other sites.

Insofar as any class activities that you have in mind require some kind of administrative support from the CCSA staff, you need to be in touch with the CCSA Program Coordinator to discuss what you have in mind. For instance, if your class needs to make an extended field trip requiring unusual transportation arrangements or if you are planning to include a local expert as a guest lecturer for your class, you need to discuss how to manage these details with Robin.

2. Contacting the CCSA Office

If you have questions about the program and what you might be able to offer, please contact your home campus CCSA representative or the CCSA Central Office at 270-745-4512. The staff is always available to discuss your question and concerns.

We look forward to receiving your CCSA course proposal.