

Issues of Race and Ethnicity in Study Abroad



- IC Student in Costa Rica

This brochure has been compiled by the Office of International Programs (OIP) in order to assist Ithaca College ALANA (African, Latino/a, Asian, Native American) students with issues which may arise when considering studying abroad. If you are an ALANA student and you are interested in studying abroad, then you are taking the right first step by reading this brochure. There are countless short term, semester and year long study abroad programs available to you that will enhance your academic career and broaden your personal horizons.

We realize that there are concerns that may be specific to your status as an ALANA student. And, of course, each of you has individual circumstances that you will need to consider when planning for your studies overseas. Some of you may be U.S. citizens, some of you may be green card holders, others of you may be in the U.S. studying with a student visa. Some of you may come from families who have done extensive traveling, others may come from families with low economic means. You may face other barriers, such as trying to fit study abroad into your curriculum or overcoming the fear of being singled out for your race or ethnicity in another culture. It is our hope that this brochure will begin to address these issues so that you can find the proper resources and means to make your hopes of studying abroad come true.

Ithaca College has many study abroad programs. Depending on your specific circumstances, you may need to focus on certain types of programs. Students are usually restricted in where they can go based on financial circumstances and/or curricular needs. There are many factors to consider when choosing the program that is right for you. The OIP and, if appropriate, the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) can assist you in finding a program that satisfies your interests, but there are several things you should do in order to prepare to study abroad. Though the list may seem overwhelming at first, with enough advanced planning you will, like all the other students who have studied abroad, get the job done. Believe us, it will be well worth it for the fantastic experiences you will have on your travels!

Steps to Studying Abroad

1. As early as your freshman year, begin talking with your advisor about your interest in studying abroad. The sooner you begin to plan a semester away, the easier it will be to tailor your Ithaca College curriculum. If you plan on going on a short term program, you will not need as much advanced planning as you will for a semester abroad.
2. Visit the Office of International Programs. Pick up and read the Guide to Study Abroad at IC (which you should have received at orientation), and/or visit the OIP website, at www.ithaca.edu/oip to see what kinds of programs are available and in which countries.
3. Attend a study abroad information session (held towards the beginning of every semester) which will let you know what your study abroad options are and how it may affect your academic career, finances, etc.
4. If appropriate, talk to the staff in the OMA and let them know that you are interested in studying abroad. If you have uncertainties based on your individual circumstances, please let them know. The OMA will work with the study abroad office to find out as much information as possible in order to ensure that your needs will be met. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times.
5. If necessary, talk to the financial aid office to see how your time overseas can be funded. Most types of financial aid will be applied to any IC or affiliated, semester long study abroad programs. Keep reading for more financial aid information.
6. Talk to your parents and/or support group to elicit support for your plans. The more informed you are when you talk to them about your travel plans and how it will affect your finances and studies, the more at ease they will probably be.
7. Once you have a good idea of where you'd like to go and when, talk to the study abroad advisor in the OIP and let her know of your plans. Let her know of your particular needs and concerns. The more you let the office staff know ahead of time, the more they can help you plan for your time overseas.
8. Once you have chosen a program you will have much to do in terms of applying and preparing, but don't worry about that now!

Also, check out www.diversityabroad.com for more information.

Funding for Study Abroad

Studying abroad need not cost more money than you would spend during a semester at Ithaca College. If you choose to go on an Ithaca College Program (the Walkabout Down Under, the London Center, or any exchange programs) or on an affiliated program, most or all of your current financial aid will be applied to your studies abroad. This includes grants, scholarships and loans. Your aid will be adjusted according to the cost of your program. By working with the Financial Aid office and the OIP, you should be able to finance a study abroad experience.

Spend some time coming up with a budget for your time overseas. The OIP and/or program provider can help you do this (ask for a cost breakdown for the program that interests you). Depending on where you choose to go abroad, the exchange rate and general cost of living may work in your favor. Of course, the opposite can also occur. Check with www.xe.com/ucc to find out the exchange rate for the country where you will be and consult guidebooks to find out what the general cost of goods is (food, clothing, transportation, etc.) and then create a budget. The structure of study abroad programs can also affect how much money needs to be spent in addition to included program costs. Keep this in mind when reviewing your options. With enough advanced planning it may be possible to spend extra time working in the summer and winter breaks in order to save money for your semester abroad (or short term program).

Many scholarships are also available for studying abroad, some particularly for students of racial and ethnic minorities. You may find scholarship information listed at:

http://www.ithaca.edu/oip/abroad_scholarships.htm



Visa and Passport Issues

Whether you are a citizen of the United States, or an international student with a green card or a student visa, you may need entry visas to visit certain countries. Check with the website below to find out about visa requirements or check with the consulates of the countries where you hope to travel to find out about specific visa requirements pertinent to your country of citizenship. You can find consulate information on the internet (for example, search “Ghana consulate United States” or go to www.embassyworld.com). Research these areas well in advance of your trip, since it may be necessary to send your passport to the consulate to receive a visa.

WEBSITE: www.dmsvisainternational.com – this is a visa service provider that the OIP has used with good results. They will let you know whether or not you need a visa, depending on your country of citizenship, and will, for a fee, obtain visas for you.

If you are a U.S. citizen and do not yet have a passport, you will have to obtain one. The OIP can tell you how.

If you are an International Student studying at IC with a student visa, you will need to make sure your paperwork is in order before studying abroad by consulting with the OIP. Check the following link: www.ithaca.edu/oip/inter_visatravel.htm and then visit the OIP to inform yourself of document requirements when traveling and the necessary documents to be allowed re-entry into the U.S. upon return from your study abroad program. The program provider may be able to assist you with getting the proper student visas for the country where you will be studying, but ultimately it is your responsibility to ensure that all visa requirements have been taken care of.

Travel has woken me up, in many ways. It's taught me how provincial I and my assumptions are. It's expanded my sense of what is possible among human beings and in terms of human kindness (and at times its opposite). And it has shown me a whole other way to live, without a steady prop, not hemmed in by familiarity, and living according to the principles and challenges I most respect.

- Pico Iyer, Travel Writer of Indian heritage

The issue of race and ethnicity overseas

As a person of a minority culture in the United States and at Ithaca College you may wonder how you will be received by your peers on your study abroad program and/or by the culture in which you will be living and studying. Studying abroad is one of the best and most interesting ways to come to understand the issue of race in another context. Of course, every person's experience in dealing with this issue is unique and the best way to gain an understanding of how your time overseas will be is to read and listen to the experiences of others who have been there. Listed in the Resources section of this brochure are some websites which have posted articles and testimonials regarding the issue of being a minority in a new culture. We encourage you to read these and to be open to new experiences.

You may find that while overseas the issue of your race is no longer as central as it is to you in the United States. Many minority students report that while overseas they are first and foremost identified by their nationality. And, attitudes towards races will vary enormously from one country to the next depending on their own historical and present day interactions and exposure to people from different walks of life. In many cases you will be greeted with great curiosity. Use these opportunities to educate people about who you are as well as to find out more about them. This applies to your student colleagues, as well and is what studying abroad is all about – learning about different cultures and how they relate to the world.

Of course, should you encounter a racial incident in which you are harassed or endangered, it must be treated seriously. You will always have a contact person when you are on a study abroad program, usually a program director. It is the responsibility of this person to look after the welfare of their program participants and you should feel free to speak to them. Speaking to people who have been to the country where you are going and researching the social, ethnic and racial state of affairs before you go can also help you be more prepared. The OIP can help to find you a study abroad ambassador who has had experience with these issues.

Culture Shock

While studying abroad, most students experience what is known as culture shock. This consists of an initial period of exhilaration as a result of the new things you are experiencing, followed by a period of isolation and homesickness. Eventually, one overcomes this period and begins to adapt to a new way of life. Spend some time before you leave creating a support network of friends and family at home to whom you can turn. Let them know ahead of time about this anticipated period of loneliness and ask them to be there for you and to support you in getting through it. Simply having someone to talk to or email with can make a world of difference. Ask the OIP for more information about culture shock and how you can best prepare for it.



Resources

PLATO –an excellent site that lists the top 10 reasons to study abroad depending on your racial/ethnic background. It also deals with discrimination, gives more resources for students and provides lists of famous people in each group who have traveled overseas.

<http://www.globaled.us/plato/diversity.html>

Brown University - provides testimonials from students who have studied in many parts of the world regarding their experiences overseas as determined by their racial, religious or LGBT status.

http://www.brown.edu/Administration/OIP/pdf_docs/diversity_st_abroad01.pdf -

Access International – provides resources for underrepresented groups in international education.

<http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/aie/>

Ambassadors – It may be useful for you to speak to a fellow student who has studied abroad. If so, let someone at OIP know and we will try to find a student with similar circumstances to your own to share their stories and advice.

Contact Information:

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- IC Student on Walkabout Program to Australia