

# Creating a global vision the case for studying abroad essay examples

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



Students who study abroad are afforded a rare opportunity to learn about foreign cultures and about themselves. And while there are adjustments to be made, adapting to differences in language, customs and beliefs is part of the educational process. Sociologists and linguists have determined that students clearly benefit from foreign study, particularly when learning a new language. Much has been made of “ culture shock,” of what can happen when young people are placed in alien environments far from home and family. There are challenges to be overcome, but the academic benefits and sense of self-reliance that a student learner derives from study abroad comprise a life-changing experience that benefits the student and the world at large. For fostering an environment in which students learn firsthand about other cultures is the surest way to promote mutual understanding among nations and break down the barriers that separate people.

Foreign study typically involves placing a student with a host family which, in addition to providing shelter and sustenance, helps students become acclimatized to their new surroundings. This process may involve everything from language learning to understanding cultural mores and nuances of socialization that one takes for granted at home. An example of this might be “ do’s and don’ts” at meal time, an important daily ritual in any society. Depending on the host society, the uninitiated student may face an imposing but educational array of subtle challenges concerning food and the propriety of meal-time conversation. In some cultures, the socialization of taste continues well into adulthood. Students entering foreign environments face “ significant cultural differences with respect to their ways of speaking about

food,” which provided a valuable learning experience concerning “ values, attitudes and beliefs” (Dufon & Churchill, 92).

Stress experienced during mealtimes with the host may prove difficult, but meals also give both student and host family a common ground, a shared humanity through which learning can take place. This “ schemata for talking about food included the relationship between food and season, different kinds of foods and their characteristics” (Dufon & Churchill, 92). It is part of a wider sense in which education happens, a relationship that transcends the classroom and the repetition of scientific formulas or poetry. For a young adult working diligently toward the completion of a degree program, this seemingly innocuous situation can prove richly rewarding and may do much to impart cultural information that the student might otherwise miss. When a young person attends university, there is an imposition of pressure to succeed and achieve, pressure the likes of which most students have likely never before faced. University life itself is an adjustment, one that may prove quite difficult for young students from both a social and educational standpoint. Affirming a common humanity between student and host family can boost a young person’s confidence, both socially and educationally, at a time when self-assurance may be in short supply.

There is an adjustment period for every student who chooses to go abroad. The length of time and difficulty of this interlude depends on the individual, but the simple reality of having to adjust to a new cultural environment is a distraction (Pearson-Evans, in Byram & Feng, 53). In spite of new communication technologies,

one's parents, friends and extended social network is simply not present. One must not underestimate the importance of moral support, nor the feelings of affirmation that face-to-face contact can produce. Acquiring a foreign language is one of the most important aspects of studying abroad, yet can also be one of the most unnerving experiences a student can encounter.

And yet experts generally agree that total immersion is the best way to become an accomplished speaker. The confidence that may arise from such a scenario will help bolster the student's self-image and chances of success in other endeavors. Culture shock is, ultimately, a matter of developing confidence, of feeling comfortable enough to participate in the culture and the language, particularly outside the classroom. Students polled as part of a 1989 study felt that "out-of-class conversations, specifically which topics and how the conversation developed, seemed to be much more 'real' than the classroom conversation" (Brecht & Robinson, in Freed, 329).

Another factor that is often overlooked is cost. There is a wide range of funding scenarios associated with degree programs that offer students the opportunity to study abroad. Some provide substantial financial assistance, while others require the student (or the student's parents) to cover the bulk of the expenses. Given the recent economic climate in Western Europe and North America, for instance, this can be a costly venture, depending on the exchange rate, inflation and other economic factors. Properly researching one's financial options can result in a true bargain, an enriching educational experience that is truly beyond price. As expensive as a university education

can be, it is in the student's best interests to look for options to make the most of the opportunity. Therefore, if the chance to study abroad arises and the costs involved are in line, the student should consider it an opportunity to maximize that which has been spent.

The (often overlooked) question of cost serves to illustrate the importance of identifying opportunities that make the most sense and offer the student the best chance to succeed and benefit academically. One reliable constant in the equation, one which augurs particularly well for English-speaking students, is the prevalence of the English language throughout the world. Many academic institutions in non-English-speaking countries offer courses in English thanks to its "lingua franca" status. Students from the United Kingdom, the United States or Canada, for instance, may find that foreign universities already offer an impressively diverse range of courses in the English language. This may present practical difficulties for a student seeking immersion, but there can be no denying that the availability of courses in English can do much to engender confidence to bolster confidence. This phenomenon is widespread throughout Europe. In Holland, "the pressure to use English has grown as universities and colleges have increasingly welcomed foreign students" (Crystal, 112).

The compliment to this commodious arrangement is that since English has a strong presence in so many countries, this produces a large representation of foreign students at universities in England, America, Australia, and other English-speaking countries. If this is so, then English-speaking students may reasonably expect to acquire valuable cultural and linguistic knowledge from

foreign students at home prior to studying abroad themselves. It is a two-way street: when one speaks of language acquisition, nothing can substitute for direct and constant exposure to native speakers in their native lands. If students from Western Europe, or Asia can expose English-speaking students to their cultures, then those students will be all the more prepared for the experience when it is their turn to study abroad. Exposure to foreign cultures is beneficial to everyone concerned, but it should be undertaken under mutually beneficial circumstances. Experts agree that it is important now more than ever to develop a sense of global citizenship. However, this awareness should be arrived at “ with caution, critique and rigor if it is to become a viable and positive influence” (Zemach-Bersin, in Lewin, 319).

Studying abroad also make more sense for students from the standpoint of maintaining quantifiable academic progress. Depending on where the student comes from (meaning country and/or university), credits earned studying abroad may be applicable toward the completion of a broad spectrum of academic pursuits. For students who struggle financially, or who have plans to seek secondary degrees immediately upon graduation, this can be a problematic situation if not thoroughly researched. Educational theorists who support the contention that studying in a foreign culture aids personal as well as academic growth would likely respond that study in a foreign country offers compensatory benefits, which transcend the standard acquisition of high marks and college credits. However, proper planning can help avoid unexpected delays in a student’s degree program, which could

prove burdensome to their parents, particularly since tuition at universities in places like the United States (for example) goes up nearly every

This is an especially high price to pay if the student has a negative experience and comes away feeling that their time, money and effort has been wasted. In *Study Abroad and Second*

*Language Use: Constructing the Self*, Valerie Pellegrino Aveni utilizes a psychological model to offer theories about optimal living and social circumstances for studying abroad. Aveni argues that students who feel “ at home” during their stay abroad are much more likely to do well in their studies. She cites a study which indicates that a “ home” environment is more conducive to effective learning, and that the institution of host families in foreign study programs makes this an attractive option for students who seek the experience. Aveni reported that those who stayed in dormitories experienced more difficulty when it came to acculturation (Aveni, 15).

Indeed, there is a decided emotional component to Aveni’s assessment and the psychological toll that study abroad, when not undertaken under commodious circumstances, can take on a student’s self-esteem and ability to acquire a new language. The cost of emotional separation from family and friends can be harmful and make it very difficult to persevere through the entire semester. Observers have recorded an extensive list of physical and psychological symptoms of estrangement, including headaches, depression, irritability and loss of appetite. The poorly adjusted student may withdraw from social activities and avoid interacting with other students in the classroom setting. However, the majority of such programs are dedicated to

making the visiting student as comfortable as possible, and it has been shown that under these circumstances students tend to succeed in their academic work and enjoy their time abroad. Therefore, studying abroad must be considered beneficial to young people who have much to gain from a truly well-rounded education.

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