

## **Proposal: Study Abroad as a Means of Exempting International Cultures Requirement**

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University of Oregon Multicultural Requirement: Bachelor's degree candidates must complete one course in two of the following categories:

- Category A: American Cultures
- Category B: Identity, Pluralism, and Tolerance
- Category C: International Cultures

### **Proposal**

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The following proposal is to allow University of Oregon students exemption from completing one International Cultures-satisfying course through participation in an approved University of Oregon study abroad program.

The *Category C: International Cultures* requirement is defined in the University of Oregon 2006-07 Bulletin as follows:

The goal is to study world cultures in critical perspective. Approved courses either treat an international culture in view of the issues raised in Categories A and B -- namely race and ethnicity, pluralism and monoculturalism, and/or prejudice and tolerance -- or explicitly describe and analyze a world view -- i.e. a system of knowledge, feeling, and belief -- that is substantially different from those prevalent in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century United States.

### **Rationale**

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Why study abroad in an approved program should exempt students from one *International Cultures* course requirement:

- Study abroad exposes students equally well, if not better than a classroom-based course, to world views different from those in the United States. Living in a different cultural context involves immersion in - and requires adaptation to - the new cultural environment. Students who study abroad are surrounded on a daily basis by the world views of the host cultures. Exposure to host culture world views occurs in the following ways:
  - Students meet and interact regularly with people who have different values and belief systems.
  - Living with host families or in integrated housing with host nationals gives students the opportunity to engage in cross-cultural interactions on a daily basis.
  - Students experience themselves as Americans in new and different ways -- they are exposed to different perspectives on American cultural values and

beliefs. Reflecting on one's own culture in an international context enables students to see other cultures in a new light.

- Students experience cultural differences in the academic setting. Cultural differences are expressed in: different faculty-student relationships, such as differences in acceptable levels of formality and address; different academic systems and accepted (or expected) general knowledge; acceptable classroom behavior (interactive style, student behavior); academic expectations (oral presentations in class, written requirements); students may be expected to take more personal responsibility for their own learning.
- Field-based learning and internships offer a high level of integration into the host culture, and demand adjustment to new cultural norms.
- Living and studying abroad provides students with direct exposure to dealing with issues of tolerance, racism, and dominant and minority cultures in a context outside the U.S. American context. It provides the opportunity for comparative reflection on identity, pluralism and tolerance in U.S. American culture.
- In the study abroad host country, students are afforded the opportunity of meeting people of diverse cultures and sub-cultures within that society, including different ethnic groups, indigenous peoples, different economic and social classes, and exposure to different gender roles. Students experience how individuals in other societies view their place in that society, being of different cultures (for example, Roma or various groups of immigrants in Europe, as they are viewed by the majority culture; indigenous populations in Ecuador; the deeply multicultural environments of London, Amsterdam, Hong Kong, and other large, international cities; the study of minority cultures in Beijing, China; apartheid in South Africa.)
- Study abroad provides exposure to vernacular culture, as well as with “high” culture studied in classrooms.
- Study abroad provides exposure to multiple and diverse cultural perspectives through the international environment of study abroad. Students interact not only with host nationals, but also with international students and faculty from diverse cultures around the world.
- Study abroad is inherently the study of different world cultures and world views; the application of cross-cultural theory in practice. Therefore, study abroad embodies the *International Cultures* requirement in practice.

### **Plan of Action**

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The UO Study Abroad staff will identify which UO-sponsored programs will meet the *International Cultures* requirement, based on the following criteria:

- Students must be enrolled full-time and maintain satisfactory academic progress throughout their academic programs abroad.
- Approved study abroad programs must be a minimum of five weeks in length. If the program is between five and nine weeks in duration, it must have substantial cultural immersion, and meet at least two of the following three criteria:
  1. Include a homestay or immersion living experience
  2. Offer a language-intensive and/or culturally-immersive curriculum
  3. Provide an internship, service learning, or integrated work or volunteer program

- Programs of ten weeks or longer will automatically satisfy the *International Cultures* requirement
- A student who participates in a program that does not fit any of the criteria above has the option to petition the Academic Requirements Committee under their usual guidelines.

### **Definition of terms**

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***Language-intensive programs*** incorporate the teaching of language at a much more rapid pace than standard on-campus language sequences. In addition, language-intensive programs provide language instruction in an immersion environment, so that language learning takes place not just in the classroom or language laboratory, but throughout all aspects of the student's daily life. As such, language-intensive programs introduce students to the use of linguistic conventions, vocabulary and communication styles as they relate to a cultural context in which the language is normally spoken.

***Culturally-immersive curricula*** are found in programs in which the preponderance of program activities focus on the cultural context of the study site—whether local, national or regional. Such programs generally include course work, excursions, guest lectures, studio critiques, and the participation of local faculty—all of which are focused on various aspects of international cultures.

***Internships, service-learning or volunteer programs*** engage students in the local community in a way that facilitates language and culture learning. Students actively engage in and learn about aspects of daily life in a professional context.

### **Conclusion**

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The University of Oregon's mission statement articulates the institution's "commitment to international awareness and understanding, and to the development of a faculty and student body that are capable of participating effectively in a global society." Study abroad is a valuable means of preparing our students to participate effectively in our global society. It is an effective and logical pathway to gain the knowledge of world cultures intended in the University of Oregon's *International Cultures* requirement. We believe that UO students who participate in study abroad programs, as outlined above, satisfy the UO *International Cultures* requirement, and should be granted an exemption from the on-campus course requirement.