

Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad

© Neriko Musha Doerr

The work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Volume 34, Issue 2, pp. 112-132

DOI: 10.36366/frontiers.v34i2.526

[www.frontiersjournal.org](http://www.frontiersjournal.org)



# Modes of Study Abroad Learning: Toward Short-Term Study Abroad Program Designs Beyond the Study Abroad Effect

Neriko Musha Doerr<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

When a class is considered a study abroad rather than on-campus course, new criteria of learning, evaluation, and vocabulary often apply. Calling it “study abroad effects”, this article examines such effects on short-term study abroad programs in the US by introducing the notion of the “mode of study abroad learning”, a kind of study abroad effect that guides how students’ study during study abroad. The article investigates three syllabi and identifies four modes of study abroad learning: the course content without specificity, the use of the notion of immersion, the lack of theoretical engagement, and the use of non-academic vocabulary. Arguing that short-term study abroad programs are often positioned nominally as “academic” but substantially as “non-academic”, this article suggests ways to make such programs academically rigorous.

## Keywords:

Academic rigor, short-term, study abroad, study abroad effects, the United States

---

<sup>1</sup> RAMAPO COLLEGE, MAHWAH, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**Corresponding author:** Neriko Doerr, [ndoerr@ramapo.edu](mailto:ndoerr@ramapo.edu)

Accepted date: 16 March 2022

## Introduction

Short-term study abroad<sup>1</sup> has been touted as a successful way to attract larger numbers of study abroad students (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2009), making it worth detailed examination. Although the comparatively short “immersion” is often critiqued (Deardorff, 2009), this article shifts the focus and investigates how short-term study abroad programs at higher education institutions in the US are often nominally “academic” but substantially not. Situating it in the current neoliberal formulation of higher education and its co-option of “experiential learning”, this article suggests ways to make such study abroad programs more academically rigorous—i.e., holding the comparable standard as regular on-campus classes.

Short-term study abroad classes are often designed and treated differently from on-campus classes. They involve different criteria for learning, evaluation, and even vocabulary, which I call “study abroad effect”. As a result, even experienced faculty reported feeling inadequate when designing such programs. In this article, I introduce the notion of “modes of study abroad learning” to identify such study abroad effects that shape contours and expectations about the study abroad classes by professors and students. The case study method is used not to generalize study abroad programs but to show examples that suggest such study abroad effects. Discussing four modes of study abroad learning—lack of specificity, use of the notion of immersion, lack of theoretical engagement, and use of non-academic vocabulary, I suggest four ways to increase academic rigor.

In what follows, I first review theories on neoliberalism and its effects on experiential learning in higher education and on perception of “truth”. Then, I introduce the methods I use and discuss four kinds of study abroad effects: structural, theoretical, perceptual, and practical. Expanding the last of these by examining three syllabus designs, I suggest four modes of study abroad learning and ways to design study abroad programs with academic rigor.

---

<sup>1</sup> The categorization of study abroad programs by its length in this article follows that in the statistics by Open Doors, which defines “short-term study abroad” as “summer or eight weeks or less” (Open Doors, 2021). It does not include local classes designed for local students on-campus although it includes customized classes for study abroad students which often happen in summer.

## Neoliberal Educated Subject and Experiential Learning

The current type of short-term study abroad programs emerged in the wider structural change through the spread of neoliberalism since the 1980s and the post-Cold War reformation discussed with globalist discourses (Tsing, 2000; Doerr, 2018). Here, in analyzing the aspect of academic rigorousness, I focus on the effects of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalist regimes promote the idea of small state, critiquing the welfare state as intruding in the lives of its citizens, stifling initiative, inhibiting choice, and fostering drab uniformity, researchers argue. The state withdraws from its responsibility to administer public resources to promote social justice, while operating to preserve an institutional framework to guarantee the proper functioning of markets and private property rights. This means drastic cutbacks in social spending, revisions of the tax system giving advantage to the wealthy, and loosened constraints on corporate growth. The gap in social services is filled by non-profit organizations with volunteers including students doing service work. Individuals are seen as independent, enterprising, self-interested, and “free” consumers who invest in themselves as a project. Such neoliberalist subject rests not on collectivist, social values but on a more individualistic pursuit of professional skills and prosperity (Conran, 2011; Harvey, 2005; Lilley et al., 2017; Sugarman, 2015).

In education, the meaning and purpose of schooling change as they have become fashioned openly around the principles of the marketplace and the logic of individualism. What has come to be considered teachable are love, wishes, and fears – the “soul”. The “neoliberal educated subject” then has the “desire” for education and social justice and is comfortable in diverse settings, being able to navigate in a globalizing world (Fendler, 1998; Vradi, 2013). Urciuoli (2018) argues that without clear academic components here, what matters as educational outcome becomes vague: students’ character, subjectivity, and moral improvement, which are supposed to be cultivated through certain “experience” such as study abroad and service work. This educational outcome is used to market colleges: the neoliberalist reformation transforms the value of experience in learning from a deeply organic process, as advocated by John Dewey, into standardized performances of subjectivity (as those with these valuable “experiences”) by students in the college marketing processes to parents, donors, employers, and even students themselves (Urciuoli 2018).

In such experiential learning, faculty control over its content based on academic discipline is moved away into administrative control, disconnecting experiential learning from academic disciplines and making it generic and interchangeable (Urciuoli, 2018). Students' achievement is often acknowledged merely through physical crossing of borders—national borders in study abroad (Beelen & Jones, 2015) or between campus “bubble” and outside “real world” depicted as “in need” in service learning (LaDousa, 2018). Urciuoli (2018) thus argues that these experiential learning programs gain value comparable and complementary to academics and that they come to constrain the value of classroom education based on academic disciplines.

In this article, I argue instead that experiential learning programs, such as study abroad, can be academically rigorous if they are designed intentionally to be more academic. In order to illustrate, I will identify ways that short-term study abroad programs lack academic rigor (i.e., study abroad effect) so that we can correct them.

## Analyzing Study Abroad Effects

Michel Foucault (1972, p. 131) argued that “truth” is constructed through each society’s “regime of truth” that decides what counts as “truth”. Each academic discipline also has its own regime of truth: what they accept as “evidence” to support an argument, making it “true”. Cultural anthropology accepts contextualized in-depth data about a small number of individuals but not the findings from surveys because they overlook nuanced details. Meanwhile, the field of study abroad may regard a small amount of in-depth, holistic, qualitative data as ungeneralizable.

What we can do then is to see the effect of such a truth claim: truth effects (Foucault, 1972). This article similarly explores the “study abroad effect”. It examines the regime of truth—both its epistemological background and the “material and practical conditions under which truth, facts, explanations come to be formulated and accepted (Rose, 1989, p. xiv)” —with respect to study abroad, what I call “the regime of study abroad”, analyzing its structural, theoretical, perceptual, and practical aspects.

This article combines multiple methods to trace four aspects of study abroad effects. I use the media text analysis method to address the structural aspect of such effects, exploring how webpages are structured and what things are described and how. For the theoretical aspect, I examine relationships

among existing theories in various fields. I approach the perceptual aspect of the effect by drawing on interviews from my ethnographic fieldwork and my experience of guiding faculty members through designing their study abroad programs. For the practical aspect, I comparatively investigate three syllabi found online, two for short-term study abroad programs and one for a regular on-campus class. I use the case-study method to examine the content and vocabulary in the syllabi. Some identifying information is changed to protect anonymity because the aim is not to criticize the individual professors who designed the course. These cases are used not to generalize all study abroad programs but to show concrete examples as symptoms of wider structural arrangements and what can get approved as study abroad programs—a systemic issue—so that they can be improved.

## Study Abroad Effects

Study abroad programs occupy a unique position in higher education. Most of them are credit-bearing, yet they are often treated as less academic. Structurally, it is not uncommon for study abroad offices to fall under student affairs and thus are disconnected from academic departments. Theoretically, study abroad research is often not in conversation with other academic fields. Perceptually, study abroad is viewed as a non-academic activity. Practically, less academically rigorous syllabi may, at times, be permitted for study abroad classes, with no review by other faculty members. This is in contrast to on-campus classes, where syllabi are usually required to include a list of weekly readings and are reviewed by faculty members for academic rigor (e.g., University of Virginia, 2021). This point is further discussed later in this article.

### Study Abroad Effect: Structural Positioning as Student Affairs and Non-Academic Activities

The push for global education, including study abroad, occurs at the institutional level in the US. The need to produce “globally competent” students was recognized by a task force of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (2004; cited in Brustein, 2009, p. 249) and the American Council on Education’s Center for International Education (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). The 2001 Association of American Colleges and Universities initiative “Shared Futures: Global Learning and Social Responsibility” encouraged colleges to help students understand issues of diversity, citizenship, interconnection, and responsible action in the global world (Hovland et al., 2009).

Structurally, study abroad programs are often housed in an independent office without affiliations to academic departments and are thus “rarely staffed by faculty” (The Forum on Education Abroad Advocacy Committee, 2014, p.8). Although study abroad deals with education and intercultural encounters, connections to the education and cultural anthropology departments, respectively, are few (see Doerr, 2018, 2021; Doerr, Puente, & Kamiyoshi, 2020). This was clear on the websites of three universities/colleges I chose from the top five in the categories of private universities (Harvard), public universities (Michigan), and liberal arts colleges (Pomona) in 2020 in the college ranking created by Niche.com (NICHE, 2020).

At Harvard University, the Office of International Education website appears below the “enrichment” page embedded under “academic”, suggesting its peripheral academic status. The website focuses on technical aspects, categorizing programs based on the type of experience—e.g., program length or enrollment pattern (direct, third-party provider, etc.)—rather than academic content. Considering that the description of on-campus academic classes covers exclusively the academic content, this focus on the technical aspects suggests its positioning as non-academic: its academic content is not important in students’ choice of the program (Harvard University, n.d.).

The University of Michigan’s study abroad office is housed in the International Center, whose website is listed under the “student life” tab instead of that of any academic department, implying it is non-academic in nature (University of Michigan International Center, n.d.). Moreover, the International Center has little involvement with the School of Education or the field of education—its director’s doctorate is in Higher Education Leadership and Policy. This contrasts with the university’s equity and diversity efforts: The Inclusive Teaching Initiative draws on research by professors in the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, the Program on Intergroup Relations and the School of Education. The Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer is a professor of psychology and education (University of Michigan the Office of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion, n.d.).

At Pomona College, the Office of Study Abroad (Pomona College Study Abroad, n.d.) is ambiguously positioned under “administration”, not “academics”, but also links to pages like “Global Pomona” (Pomona College Global Pomona, n.d.) that are academically focused, though not directly linked to academic departments on campus. This indicates that study abroad is seen not quite as an academic endeavor.

In sum, these study abroad offices are structurally positioned as independent from academic programs on campus. Study abroad classes are generally positioned as enrichment or extracurricular activities rather than academic classes on par with on-campus classes: a study abroad effect. Here, I suggest that drawing on the expertise of faculty members in the relevant academic field would benefit study abroad programs to become more academically rigorous.

### Study Abroad Effect: Theoretical Isolation

Theoretically, study abroad researches rarely draw on theories from education or cultural anthropology, academic disciplines relevant in analyzing student study abroad experience. Instead, study abroad research centers on concepts developed specifically in the field of study abroad, such as ways to effectively nurture students' "global competence" to help them become "global citizens" (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Ogden, 2006) or how to measure them (Alred & Byram, 2006; Deardorff, 2009). Global competence and related concepts are defined as having knowledge about world history and global issues (e.g., environment), foreign language proficiency, adaptability to diverse cultures, openness to difference, and the ability to collaborate across cultures (Hunter et al., 2006; Lambert, 1994). Global citizens are defined mostly to have the above traits (Deardorff, 2009). A smaller number of research articles critique power relations in study abroad experience via discourses of adventure (Zemach-Bersin, 2009), colonialism (Ogden, 2007), or immersion (Doerr, 2013).

These discussions do not engage with existing theories on globalization that have been extensively developed in cultural anthropology, such as regimes of mobility that treat human mobility differently based on people's race and class (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) and the ideology of globalism (Tsing, 2000); on learning via peripheral participation in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991); on the politics of measuring "competence" (Labov, 1970); or on what comes to be considered "legitimate knowledge" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The lack of conversation with these other theoretical frameworks despite their usefulness suggests a study abroad effect on theory production.

### Study Abroad Effect: Valorization of Fun and Immersion over Classroom Learning

Perceptionally, study abroad risks being considered a fun, non-academic endeavor. Faculty members whom I assisted in designing a faculty-led short-term study abroad program often expressed uncertainty as to what content to include in the program. As they had previously designed many on-campus classes, this suggests a study abroad effect: a feeling that the study

content of study abroad classes has to be different. Although not all faculty may feel this way, the fact that many felt the need to design them differently suggests the existence of such perception.

They were also concerned about making their short-term study abroad class “fun” for students; some even said they did not want to inundate the students with “work”. This is another study abroad effect: such concerns are absent during the designing of on-campus classes, reflecting the perception that study abroad is non-academic. Although both study abroad and on-campus classes must secure sufficient numbers of students to occur, professors on campus rarely make the class less academically rigorous to attract students.

There is also the notion that students would learn better through immersion than in a classroom while studying abroad. Study abroad guidebooks and researchers suggest “[free] time is just as, if not more, important to your experiential learning than the time you spend in the classroom” (Loflin, 2007, p. 130), and that “much of the learning took place outside the confines of the courses themselves” (Peterson, 2002, p.1). In my interviews, study abroad students reported that professors there told them to prioritize their personal travels over classwork (Doerr, 2015).

This contrasts with on-campus classes, such as history, political science, or economics, where professors usually would not tell students they would learn more outside their class than inside. Domestic students themselves do not learn about their local “culture” by merely growing up there; they need to understand, among other things, the history, political systems, economic structure, and literature, including by taking academic classes. If they are learning about another society, it presents all the more reason that they need academically rigorous knowledge to understand the society, beyond experiencing how they spend their daily life—“living like the local”—as advocated by the immersion concept.

### Study Abroad Effect: Modes of Study Abroad Learning

In practice, and beyond the travel aspect, study abroad programs are often executed differently from on-campus classes. To illustrate this difference, I compare two study abroad syllabi and one on-campus syllabus, the latter to show what is considered academically rigorous on-campus. The thrust is less about particular syllabi or the faculty who designed them than about the kind of syllabi that get approved as study abroad programs—a systemic issue. It does not mean these syllabi represent all study abroad programs. Rather, it is systemic because such syllabi are allowed to be used, which implies the standard of study abroad programs (even though other programs may be more



academically rigorous): study abroad program is only as good as its worst syllabus, just like a sport team is only as good as its worst player.

### Study Abroad to Germany from College A

The “short term study abroad to Germany” class was a 400-level undergraduate/600-level graduate level course offered in the Spring 2019 semester at College A. The class met for 1.5 hours every other week (except weeks 12–14) from January 24 to May 16. The students were in Germany from May 27 to June 1. Although this class is explicitly labeled “short term study abroad”, it differs from its common form because it is embedded in a semester-long class, with the travel part functioning as a co-curricular activity. It is, however, all the more reason it can be more academically rigorous because of the time available to focus on academic learning “at home”; not being so indexes a study abroad effect.

“Prior to travel”, the course description says, “students will learn and apply in-depth international business culture assessment tools and specific research projects designed to maximize the value of their encounters abroad”. Moreover, “the course will cover general knowledge of German business, society and culture as well as a primary research project on an international business topic”.

“General knowledge” of a country as class content is a manifestation of a mode of study abroad learning that often results in superficial knowledge. In on-campus classes, especially 400- and 600-level courses, the content usually focuses instead on specific details that reflect the professor’s expertise: specific time periods, specific individuals, and concrete events, as will be shown in the third case below.

Learning outcomes included ability to demonstrate “critical thinking about the concepts of culture and cultural variations in international management, ... explain the influence of environmental factors on societal culture”, display “in-depth expertise on the research topic, and “analyze the differences and similarities between the German and U.S. perspectives”.

Some specific business practices were indeed a focus, but the binary notion of “culture” here suggests another mode of study abroad learning. For example, the “cultural variation” mentioned appears to be between Germany and the US, given the suggestion that it was considered in the context of “international” management, rather than within Germany or the US.

Several other things point to a lack of academic rigor in comparison to on-campus classes—a mode of study abroad learning. No readings were listed on the syllabus for each week, and there was “no required textbook to purchase. Readings will be posted on [an online platform]”. It is unthinkable for on-campus class syllabi not to list readings. In the very College A’s teaching resource center’s website, the resources to produce syllabi for on-campus classes, borrowed from another college, shows the expectation that syllabi have a weekly list of readings (University of Virginia, 2021, p.4, note 10).

The descriptions of weekly content also lacked academic rigor, listing “scholarship and travel document preparation” (February 7) without specifics of the scholarship; “guest speakers; introduction to research project” (February 21) and “guest lecture” (March 7) without named academic content or titles of lectures; and “cross-cultural communication; German cultural values” (March 7) and “German business etiquette and cultural norms” (April 11), both of which suggest a generalized, culturalistic summary of “German cultural values” and “norms”, again lacking an academic approach.

The final grade was based on five equally weighted components of evaluation. The first, participation, was divided into class activities and discussions, weekly online quizzes, and “basic familiarity” with German language (in Germany, class was conducted in English). The second was a company analysis project, and the third, a team research project done before the trip, designed to develop “skill at problem identification”, “problem solving”, and “sorting through and prioritizing information to identify key strategic issues”, as well as ability to “assess the appropriate application...of the tools available when faced with a strategic decision in an international context”. The fourth part was a presentation of “an in depth look at a specific topic” before the trip and a revision of it done later, in Germany. Though academic-sounding and having both a narrow and a deep focus, these projects involved no theoretical preparation of students via the lectures and assigned readings that are the norm in on-campus classes. The fifth component was the final exam (May 16).

In sum, this syllabus posits several modes of study abroad learning. The class content lacked the academic rigor usually expected on campus. Students gained only general knowledge of Germany, formulated in binary, culturalistic terms. There was no expectation of academic-level language skills in the destination, nor were there assigned readings, specified weekly academic content, or requirement of theoretical preparation for the class projects.

## Cultural Immersion Program in Mexico from College B

The “Cultural Immersion Program” (January 3–24, 2020) featuring a homestay (2 students per house) and “weekly field trips around City D, workshops and tours” was described in the syllabus as:

... 3-week Mexican Culture and Spanish Language Program at the Universidad C in City D! The program features the course "El Corazón de México: Cultural traditions, history, and Spanish Language in City D", a 3-week hands on course that counts as a World Culture Course Distribution.

The first section, titled “Mexican and Local Culture Course”, had no readings assigned. Covered topics like taco fillings and negotiation of prices indicated a little academic component. Met thrice weekly, totaling 24 hours, topics in Week 1 included “City D History” (subsections: “indigenous groups, early immigrants from Spain, Mexican independence, SMA nowadays”) and “Local Traditions” (subsections: “Easter and Holy Week, Day of the Dead, Symbolism of Our Lady of Guadalupe”). Week 2 covered “Mexican Art” (subsections: “famous Mexican artists and indigenous art”), and “Local Arts & Crafts” (subsections: “art schools, murals, galleries, local crafts”), and Week 3, “Gastronomy” (subsections: “endemic products and agriculture, traditional Mexican dishes, and endemic products and agriculture”) and “habits and lifestyle” (subsections: “Mexican markets, negotiating prices, and a comprehensive guide to taco fillings”). The second section, “Mexican Culture Workshops”, consisted of hands-on activities, implying an extracurricular program. It met twice a week, totaling 21 hours (Week 1: “contemporary art”; Week 2: “clay modeling”; Week 3: “engravings”). The third section, “Spanish language”, met three times a week, totaling 27 hours. Level 1 started with “use correctly Mexican greetings and farewells” and ended with “request basic information on a product or service”. Level 2 began with “describe celebrations and traditions” and ended with “ask for/give information about dishes and products”. The activities in the fourth section, Friday “field trips with teachers” with the classes above resembled guided sightseeing tours devoid of theoretical engagement: “At the end of each week, teachers will take the students on a 3-hour tour, to reinforce the topics covered in the Culture and Spanish classes taken during the week”. Topics included “Main historical landmarks in City D: guided trolley tour”, “Local gastronomy: shopping tour”, and “Visit to traditional candy makers”.

The assessment comprised two parts: culture (active participation in class: 20%, weekly written report: 20%; final presentation: 20%; memory book: 40%) and Spanish (active participation in class: 20%; weekly quizzes: 40%; final

exam: 40%). “Memory book”, the most heavily weighted assignment in the culture section, was an unusual assignment for a college course. With absence of assigned academic readings to connect their experience to theoretical discussions, it resembled a travel memoir. If in an academic register, it should have been termed a “final project”, “summary findings”, “observation report”, or “fieldnotes”.

Overall, this course syllabus reveals a study abroad program linked to general “Mexican culture” that lacks the academic rigor of a college class and focused on experiences, without assigned readings and thus academic content, and with non-academic vocabulary: a mode of study abroad learning. For contrast, I describe below an on-campus class regarded as the same “world culture distribution” at the same College B.

### Jerusalem: Sacred Space, Contested Space; On-Campus Class at College B

The class “Jerusalem: Sacred Space, Contested Space”, offered in Spring 2020 at College B, contrasts with the two study abroad classes discussed above. Contrast with the second one is especially important. The class title conveys the specificity and narrow focus of the content, allowing for deeper investigation, as seen in the course description:

... we will explore a wide range of sources—literary, archaeological, and iconographical... We will study the political, physical, and conceptual development of this urban space through its multiple destructions and reconstructions, considering the emergence of Jerusalem as a sacred space, an apocalyptic space, and a contested space. We will also give some attention to the political tensions in modern Jerusalem...

Touching upon more abstract items while remaining specific, the aim is to “develop skills in interpreting diverse primary source material, learning the art of reading ancient and modern sources—literary and archaeological...develop skills in critical thinking by reading, analyzing and discussing scholarly arguments...”

A textbook, a Bible for text analyses, and readings posted online are listed as assigned readings, along with a nine-book “selected bibliography”. Lecture topics, readings, and assignments are listed for the biweekly class. Class topics include “Hezekiah and the Emergence of a Jerusalem Mythology” and “Josiah’s Reforms and the Centralization of Jerusalem”.

Course requirements include “Regular attendance, daily readings, and in-class participation” (10%), Response Papers (40%), Midterm Exam (25%) and Final Exam (25%). Four assigned response papers are on specific academic topics, including: “Nadia Abu el-Haj’s book created an academic/political firestorm after its publication in 2001. Your reading selection focuses on her critique of Israeli archaeologists digging in Jerusalem. Summarize her argument/critique of Israeli archaeology. Why do you suppose her argument was so controversial? Assess the (de)merits of her argument.” (paper 1); and “Compare Cline and Finkelstein on Jerusalem under David and Solomon. Finkelstein’s interpretation has elicited strong, in some cases vitriolic, opposition. Why?” (paper 2)

This on-campus class syllabus differs drastically from the syllabi of the two study abroad programs examined above. Its specific focus with theoretical engagement guided by scholarly discussions is illustrated in its course description, class topics, assigned readings, and assignments. Its contrast with the second syllabus discussed earlier that meets the same “world culture distribution” requirement at the same College B suggests not only how that syllabus could have been designed to be academically rigorous—with theoretical engagement with issues specific to City D—but also the study abroad effect: syllabi with such different academic standards can be approved when one is a study abroad program. I will expand on this study abroad effect next as four modes of study abroad learning and suggest alternatives.

## **Modes of Study Abroad Learning**

Although actual class delivery may differ as professors adjust to each situation, the syllabus points to the design of the class. The comparison of the three syllabi above suggests four modes of study abroad learning that guide the class design.

### **Mode of Study Abroad Learning 1: Lack of Specificity**

The first mode of study abroad is a lack of specificity in the learning content. College A’s syllabus suggested gaining general knowledge of Germany. College B’s study abroad syllabus covered history, famous people, cuisines, and landmarks, with some hands-on activities, at a “general cultural” knowledge level, with no specific foci allowing for in-depth investigation of topics as seen in the College B on-campus class syllabus. In my work observing study abroad programs, I have even seen tourist guidebooks on the host society assigned as readings.

To make the program more academically rigorous, I suggest incorporating specific foci based on the expertise of the professor, engaging students in deeper, theoretical understanding of the topic, as seen in College B's on-campus class.

### Mode of Study Abroad Learning 2: Immersion as Learning

The second mode of study abroad learning is learning through immersion with specific assumptions behind it: "culture" as internally homogeneous bounded unit, overlapping with nation-state border (see Doerr, 2013). This mode of learning is reflected in the two cases: the College A syllabus' focus on general knowledge and cultural difference between the US and Germany in binary culturalist terms to be learned by going to Germany; and the College B study abroad program's focus on experience without theoretical engagement.

Daily experience that is unconnected to wider structural issues turns the immersion experience into mere learning of daily customs. Insofar as study abroad is a college class with college credits, it needs to be more than what one can experience by just living or traveling there. Some study abroad researchers who have critiqued immersion as allowing for shallow understanding suggest combining immersion with reflective journaling or engaging with local community members through service work (Lewin & Van Kirk, 2009). However, reflection or community engagement needs further theoretical engagement to make the program academically rigorous.

Critical pedagogy, which draws knowledge from students' experience, urges connecting that knowledge to theoretical investigation of the ways relations of power operate (Giroux, 2001). I follow this approach and suggest urging students to connect what they learn through immersion to wider structural arrangements and theoretical frameworks. One such project is an investigation of a specific daily item by (1) tracing where the raw materials come from, how they are excavated and made into products, and how it is transported, advertised, and sold, and (2) examining factors that enable/hinder the process, controversies (e.g., over environmental impact, labor conditions) and their solutions. Such projects can be pursued before or during (or even without) studying abroad, focusing on commodities seen in the study abroad destination (see Doerr, 2021; in press). Analyzing daily experience as symptoms of wider structural arrangements in such ways not only encourages students to

understand their daily life but also inspires them to engage in macro-level arrangements, bringing about social changes.

I thus suggest reframing the immersion concept, from the learning of daily customs and living with cognitive dissonance, to providing experiences to be analyzed as symptoms of wider structural arrangements at the national (e.g., tariffs, various social institutions), regional (e.g., mandates of the European Union), and global (e.g., international trade agreements such as NAFTA) levels. This allows students to understand their role in shaping, as citizens who vote for certain regulations and as consumers who vote with money, what they see in the host society.

The immersion concept also perpetuates the nation-state ideology that assumes nation, culture, and language as discrete, internally homogeneous units when it frames study abroad experience in static, culturally binary terms that depict students jumping from their home culture into a host society's very different culture and when it discourages students from time with fellow compatriot students (Doerr, 2013).

Arguing for breaking down such binary perception, I propose using the framework of multi-scalar networks (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2017) to design study abroad programs. Çağlar and Glick Schiller argue that individuals develop diverse networks based on their multiple subject positions: e.g., ethnic networks, business networks, political affiliations, religious organizations, and neighborhood communities, any of which may overlap or contradict each other. Their lives then are crisscrossed with diverse people affecting their viewpoints and behavior. With this approach, the professor can encourage students to think of their encounters during study abroad not as reflecting static and discrete "German culture" or "Mexican culture" but as encounters with specific individuals with various subject positions that students may or may not have something in common. Students can then be encouraged to examine what structural arrangements shaped these subject positions and what theoretical frameworks best allow them to analyze their encounters. This alternative approach reframes going to Germany or Mexico not as jumping into a totally alien culture but as experiencing things shaped by wider contexts with diverse connections to their home.

### Mode of Study Abroad Learning 3: Lack of Theoretical Engagement

The third mode of study abroad learning is the lack of theoretical engagement. Neither study abroad program at Colleges A or B featured assigned readings, in stark contrast with the on-campus class at College B. Planned experiences like field trips or class projects like the “memory book” did not include readings that suggest theoretical engagement. Again, this is not to say all study abroad programs lack theoretical engagement; rather, it is to say that the existence of such syllabi in study abroad indicate its acceptance, implying theoretical engagement is not required.

While experiential learning is an important part of academic exercise, it must connect to theoretical investigation of the experience via abstract conceptualization, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget argued (Kolb, 1984). Although developed separately, critical pedagogy can also work to link experience and theory (Giroux, 2001).

What I suggest then is positioning the study abroad as a field trip, before and after which scholarly readings support theoretical analysis of experience. Providing students with in-depth, topic-specific theoretical knowledge of what they will probably experience in the host society before they travel allows them to ask local experts intelligent questions, instead of learning things on the spot during their stay. If students are prepared with knowledge beforehand so that they can weigh several theoretical approaches to what is to be experienced, once in the destination, they can learn local viewpoints from guest speakers and by interviewing people, visiting institutions, and observing people’s actions, creating layered understanding of the situations in host society. That way, students can gain knowledge not only from literature and theories but also from people and grassroots viewpoints in the host society, suggesting a unique contribution of studying abroad.

### Mode of Study Abroad Learning 4: Non-academic Vocabulary

The fourth mode of study abroad learning is the use of non-academic vocabulary. Though less common in the College A syllabus, the College B study abroad syllabus included vocabulary, as in “memory book” assignment, less acceptable in regular on-campus classes. It was clear in its contrast with that used in the College B on-campus class syllabus.



Vocabulary creates impressions of things described (Miner, 1953) and affects the tone and expectations of work (Plummer, 1995), shaping an important part of a program's design. Academic vocabulary inclines professors and students to expect academic rigor in students' work. For example, a commonly used term, "pre-departure orientations", implies practical information sessions or icebreakers for students; if they are in fact college classes, they should instead be called "classes" or "the first part of the course". "Pre-trip paper" indicates a cursory look into the study abroad destination, a marginal addition to the on-site experience. Instead, it can be a scholarly paper like any other college-level paper and can be referred to as such, like the "first assignment".

A student's writing during the study abroad stay is often called a "journal", indexing a "travel journal" type of writing focused on personal feelings. As a class assignment, a student work usually focuses on examination and analysis, and thus should be called an "observation report" or "analytical notes". "Reflection", a term often used for digesting experience with personal touch, can be replaced with a more academic term such as "analysis", urging students to include in-depth, theory-informed analyses. Prompts for such analysis therefore can be not "questions for reflection" but "analysis questions".

The phrase, "share your experience", in a post-trip presentation signals that what the students did there was just "experience". If they did examine, investigate, and analyze their experience as recommended earlier, the prompt should be "report your findings" or "present your observation/analyses". Vocabulary and suggested tone do affect how students view the work, how professors grade their work, and what is expected from the class. Words used in study abroad syllabus can be as scholarly as those in on-campus class syllabi.

## Conclusion

Regarding a class as a study abroad class affects how we treat, discuss, think about, and design it. In this article, I have called this phenomenon a "study abroad effect". We can observe study abroad effect when a credit-bearing class is not positioned in the relevant academic department but in student affairs; when our research does not draw on theories in other, relevant academic fields; when we think students learn more outside the classroom than in it; and when we design a class without scholarly readings or theoretical engagement.

Focusing on the last point, I further discussed how study abroad effects are manifested in class design via syllabi as four modes of study abroad learning: lack of specific focus, use of the problematic notion of immersion, lack of theoretical engagement, and use of non-academic vocabulary. Designing the study abroad course by focusing on specific topics based on a professor's expertise with theoretical engagement, as in on-campus classes, organizing it as a scholarly class that includes a field trip, replacing binaristic culturalist frameworks of immersion with a multi-scalar network framework in analyzing the students' experience which is also seen as symptoms of wider structural arrangements, and using academic vocabulary on the syllabus all would allow the class to be an academically rigorous class that engages students in theoretically informed discussions about their study abroad destination.

A comment on an earlier version of this article in Webinar (Cinti & Doerr, 2020) posited that study abroad is not supposed to be academic because its aim is students' holistic development. If this is the case, study abroad can be reframed as a non-credit bearing character development program without calling it "study"—e.g., "experience abroad" or "enrichment trips". Just like sports, civic engagement and clubs, such programs can be subsidized by the college and include no fees associated with being credit-bearing. It can thus offer less expensive alternatives to study abroad that nonetheless nurture students, which can be something to be explored in the future. Going abroad is often a life-changing experience in itself. If we call it study abroad, however, it should be academically rigorous.

## References

- Alred, G., & Byram, M. (2006). British students in France. In M. Byram & A. Feng (Eds.), *Living and studying abroad: Research and practice*. Multilingual Matters (pp. 210–31). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853599125-012>
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. Sage.
- Bingle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (2011). International service learning. In R. G. Bingle, J. A. Hatcher, & S. G. Jones (Eds.), *International service learning* (pp. 3–28). Stylus.
- Chieffo, L., & Griffiths, L. (2009). Here to stay: Increasing acceptance of short-term study abroad programs. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad*, (pp. 365–380). Routledge.
- Cinti, J., & Doerr, N.M. (2020). Designing high impact short-term study abroad programs. Webinar for IDEAS (Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students) program supported by The Capacity Building Program for U.S. Study Abroad, the U.S. Department of State and World Learning. (July 16)

- Deardorff, D. (2009). Understanding the challenges of assessing global citizenship. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad*, (pp. 346–64). Routledge.
- Doerr, N.M. (2013). Do “global citizens” need the parochial cultural other?: Discourses of study abroad and learning by doing. *Compare* 43(2), 224–243.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2012.701852>
- Doerr, N.M. (2015). Learner subjects in study abroad: Discourse of immersion, hierarchy of experience, and their subversion through situated learning. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 36(3), 369–382.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.871448>
- Doerr, N.M. (2018.) *Transforming study abroad: A handbook*. Berghahn Books.
- Doerr, N.M. (2021). Global education beyond immersion and regimes of mobility. In T. Neimann, J.J. Felix, E. Shliakhovchuk, & L.L. Hindman (Eds), *Policy and practice: Challenges for equality in education* (pp. 259–278). IGI Global.
- Doerr, N.M. (in press). Structural competence beyond global competence: Overcoming the culturalist difference framework in study abroad. *Compare*.
- Doerr, N.M., Puente, D. & Kamiyoshi, U. (2020). Global citizenship, identity and intercultural competence: Student identities in education abroad.” In A.C. Ogden, B. Streitwieser, & C.V. Mol (Eds.), *Education abroad: Bridging scholarship and practice* (pp. 119–134). Routledge.
- Fendler, L. (1998). What is it impossible to think? A genealogy of the educated subject. In T. S. Popkewitz & M. Brennan (Eds.), *Foucault’s challenge* (pp. 39–63). Teachers College Press.
- The Forum on Education Abroad Advocacy Committee. 2014. Strategies for Education Abroad Advocacy on Campuses. <https://forumea.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/StrategiesEdAbrdAdvocacyCampuses2010.pdf>
- Foucault, M. (1972). *Archaeology of knowledge*. Harper Colophon.
- Giroux, H. (2001). *Theory and resistance in education*. Bergin & Garvey.
- Çağlar, A., & Glick Schiller, N. (2017). Introducing multiscale city-making and emplacement. In A. Çağlar & N. Glick Schiller (Eds.), *Migrants and city-making: Multiscalar perspectives on dispossession*, (pp. 1-46). Duke University Press.
- Glick Schiller, N., & Salazar, N. B. (2013). Regimes of mobility across the globe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39(2), 183–200.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.723253>
- Harvard University. (n.d.) Programs. <https://oie.fas.harvard.edu/programs>
- Hovland, K., Musil, C. M., Skilton-Sylvester, E., & Jamison, A. (2009). It takes a curriculum: Bringing global mindedness home. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad* (pp. 466–84). Routledge.
- Hunter, B., White, G. P., & Godbey, G. C. (2006). What does it mean to be globally competent? *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 267–85.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1028315306286930>

- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
- Labov, W. (1970). The logic of nonstandard English. In W. Fredrick (Ed.), *Language and Poverty* (pp. 153–87). Markham.
- Lambert, R. D. (1994). Parsing the concept of global competence. In Lambert, R. (Ed.), *Educational exchange and global competence* (pp. 11–24). Council on International Educational Exchange.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lewin, R. & Van Kirk, G. (2009). It's not about you: The UConn Social Entrepreneur Corps Global Commonwealth Study Abroad model. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad* (pp. 543–64). Routledge.
- Loflin, S. E. (2007). *Adventures abroad: The student's guide to studying overseas*. Kaplan.
- NICHE. 2020. 2020 Top private universities in America.  
<https://www.niche.com/colleges/search/top-private-universities/>
- Ogden, A. C. (2006). Ethnographic inquiry: Reframing the learning core of education abroad. *Frontiers* (13), 87–112. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v13i1.175>
- Ogden, A. C. (2007). The view from the veranda: Understanding today's colonial student. *Frontiers* (xv) 35-55. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v15i1.215>
- Open Doors. (2021). Fast Fact 2021. [https://opendoorsdata.org/fast\\_facts/fast-facts-2021/](https://opendoorsdata.org/fast_facts/fast-facts-2021/)
- Peterson, C. (2002). Preparing engaged citizens: Three models of experiential education for social justice. *Frontiers* (8), 165-206. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v8i1.99>
- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling sexual stories: Power, change and social worlds*. Routledge.
- Pomona College Study Abroad (n.d.) Study Abroad.  
<https://www.pomona.edu/administration/study-abroad>
- Pomona College Global Pomona (n.d.) Global Pomona. <https://www.pomona.edu/global-pomona>
- Rose, N. (1989). *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self*. Free Association Books.
- Tsing, A. (2000). The global situation. *Cultural Anthropology* 15(3), 327–60. DOI:  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2000.15.3.327>
- Zemach-Bersin, T. (2009). Selling the world: Study abroad marketing and the privatization of global citizenship. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad* (pp. 303–20). Routledge.
- University of Michigan International Center (n.d.) Study Abroad.  
<https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/abroad/swt/study>
- University of Michigan the Office of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion. (n.d.). Units.  
<https://odei.umich.edu/units-and-initiatives/>
- University of Virginia 2021. Appendix D: Scored & Annotated Syllabi.  
<https://cte.virginia.edu/sites/cte.virginia.edu/files/fontyourface/Appendix-D-Annotated-Syllabi-5-31-17.pdf>

## Author Biography

**Neriko Musha Doerr** received a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology from Cornell University. Her research interests include study abroad, politics of difference, language and power, civic engagement, and politics of education in Japan, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the United States. Her publications include *Transforming Study Abroad: A Handbook*, and *The Global Education Effect and Japan: Constructing New Borders and Identification Practices*, and articles in various peer-reviewed journals. She currently teaches at Ramapo College in New Jersey, U.S.A.