Bridging the Curriculum:
A Community of Scholars Abroad
Bridging the Curriculum:

Study abroad offers students the opportunity to experience new cultures, new places, and even new foods. The value of study abroad lies in the ability to link those experiences in and out of the classroom, and back to what students have been studying at Georgetown. What better way to reflect on the process of acculturation, culture shock, and awe than to prepare a blog while abroad?

The eight students featured in this report all received a technology award from the Office of International Programs, which allowed them to stay in touch with each other, and with friends and family back home. From Buenos Aires to London to Shanghai, they reflect on their experiences as immigrants.
A Community of Scholars Abroad

Each fall 15 freshmen in Professor Elizabeth Hervey Stephen’s School of Foreign Service proseminar on immigration start a 4-year journey to develop a Community of Scholars among themselves. With support from the Provost’s office through an Undergraduate Learning Initiative grant these 15 students are offered the opportunity to take courses in the sophomore (Immigrant Ethnography) and senior year (Immigration Research Seminar) with Dr. Stephen. During the junior year many of the students go abroad, which is a challenge to the continuity of the community.

In order to promote communication of the students while abroad, each junior prepared a blog and/or wrote letters that were shared among the group.

Each student was asked to write about his or her experience living and studying abroad, with a final reflection piece about what it was like to be an immigrant in the country of study.

The blogs have been read widely, and became an excellent means for parents and friends “back home” to hear about classes, friends, and trips. One student’s fifth grade teacher used his blog to instruct the current fifth graders all about Egypt!

Through the blogs and letters students linked their studies abroad to their courses back at Georgetown and helped students to integrate their learning outside the classroom to their formal studies.

The following report highlights eight students who studied abroad in 2008-09 in seven countries on four continents.
Georgetown University Study Abroad

Georgetown students are encouraged to spend a full year, semester, or summer abroad to enrich their academic program. The Overseas Studies office within the Office of International Studies at Georgetown University promotes, supports, and develops international and intercultural educational opportunities for students, and in so doing, helps to define the international character of Georgetown. In keeping with the Jesuit philosophy of education and service, these overseas opportunities invite participants to reflect on the values that form their own identities, and encourage them to assume their roles as responsible world citizens.

The Office of International Studies and the Provost's office provided technology grants to the students included in this report so that they could reflect on their role as immigrants in the host country and to link that experience to their studies back on the Hilltop.
The proseminar class of Dr. Elizabeth Hervey Stephen in the Fall of 2006, continued on as a group in a course called “Immigrant Ethnography” in the spring of 2008. During that course, students worked with middle school students in a DC Public Charter School, Academia Bilingüe de la Comunidad. Each middle school student participated in a community service project ranging from community gardens to cleaning up a local park. The intrepid GU students supervised the projects and added guidance. Following this experience, the group entered their junior year and scattered to all parts of the globe. Following are representative blogs from the students. Shown above are: (L to R, back row): Sophie Penichet, Lucy Bridgers, Caroline Coburn, Dr. Stephen, Eleni Fisher, Mariam Khan. Front row: Layla Zaidane, Claire Brennan, Brian Koh, Duyen Bui, and Andrew Baker. (Not pictured: Gigi Safazadeh)
Claire Brennan is from Raleigh, North Carolina. She is a junior in the SFS and majoring in Culture & Politics, with a focus on Immigration Studies. Her particular regions of interest are Latin America and Eastern Europe. In the fall of 2008 Claire studied at the Georgetown University program in Alanya, Turkey. Outside of school, Claire works at a DC restaurant and also as a research assistant for a local diplomatic journalist. After graduation, she hopes to stay in DC and work for an NGO that deals with human rights, especially the rights of refugees. She is also considering joining the Peace Corps.

One of the most rewarding experiences about Turkey has been the Community Based Learning component. Once a week, on Fridays, we go to a local public elementary school, called Kestel-Alantur, and teach English to the 5th graders there. While many public schools in Turkey offer English language instruction, there aren’t nearly enough English teachers to do the job properly, so teachers end up traveling to different schools each day. I’m pretty sure that our group is the only English instruction these 5th graders are getting at the moment.

In any case, the kids are smart and funny and so happy to have us there. My group of girls gave me a nickname during our second class period, and they quickly realized that they are as much my Turkish teachers as I am their English teacher.

I love this part of the semester so much that I’ve started volunteering at another local school. At Kestel-Alantur we work with the same group of students every week. But at this school Patrick and I go to different classrooms each time, and usually two or three classrooms during the 2 hour block that we’re there. Instead of planning the lessons, we just do our best to help with whatever the class is already learning from their English teacher. The students are eager to meet us and ask us tons of questions, but its much harder to feel like I’m accomplishing something when I only visit a classroom every 3 weeks or so. Still, any contact that the students can have with a native English speaker can only help them out.

Both groups of students have lots and lots of questions. They usually start by asking us if we like Ataturk, and then applaud once we say we do. Then they want to know what is different between Turkey and America, what our favorite part of Turkey is, what we like best about Alanya, and which soccer team we root for. Once these questions are out of the way, it’s much easier to talk about things like classroom vocabulary in English. At both schools, we get laughed at a lot, either for our poor Turkish language skills or for the way we interact with each other. But its all in good fun I think, and I know I definitely enjoy it.
Brian Koh

https://digitalcommons.georgetown.edu/blogs/inaf-bkk6/
Brian Koh is a junior in the College and is from Rowland Heights, California. Brian's studies have focused in government and economics. He has actively participated in the Georgetown Swimming and Diving Team. School and sport are an important part of his life, but he also enjoys working with middle school kids through an organization called Grassroots Hoyas, which has become an important aspect of his time. Brian has also been involved in the Georgetown University Leadership Academy and the Georgetown University Student Athlete Advisory Committee. His future plans involve spending a significant amount of time back in Brazil and South Africa. After those travels, he intends to work with a government agency. He was in Brazil in the summer of 2008.

Well, I am here in Brazil and it has been an amazing time so far. I have met people from all over the world and they are the most wonderful people ever. It’s crazy because our group gets along so well, one would think that we have known each other for years now. So I am in Salvador do Bahia, Brazil, living in a 45 person dorm style room and it’s been unique and challenging but manageable. At times it’s been hard to manage living in such a large place with so many people but at the same time it gives you a chance to become friends with everyone. It feels like freshman year all over again, but in a strange country.

I have been working at two different places in the same community. One is at a preschool and the other is teaching English at the local community center which is the church. The little kids are the most amazing people ever. There are about 20 of them and all are around 5 years old. In the past two days they have taught me so much and it’s just amazing to see these kids with so little yet they are so care free and joyous all the time. They have me teaching a little English, like the alphabet and numbers, but they love dancing and basically just going wild. The other day we had balloons and they just went absolutely insane it was pretty amazing to see.

The English teaching has been great. They help me with my Portuguese and I help them learn English. We started with the alphabet and slowly started moving to small phrases. The class has been growing in size which is nice to see. The first time I had to teach it was completely unexpected because our organizers told us the wrong days but it worked out in the end. There has been this older gentleman, at first glance he looked really intimidating but he turned out to be extremely helpful and interested in our language. The one thing I have realized is that as long as you try to learn their language and immerse yourself in their culture they are extremely accepting of you and want to help you.

We have been two different sites in Salvador one was a turtle sanctuary and the other was a town called Pelorinha and we had an amazing tour of the city. There is a huge elevator that divides the city into two parts, the older town and newer town. It’s a site to see. Other than these two places we have just been hanging around the beach and working at our placements.
Caroline Coburn

http://Cbcinsa.blogspot.com
Caroline Coburn grew up in Shaker Heights, OH. She is majoring in English with minors in History and Government. At Georgetown she volunteers with Grassroots Hoyas (using sports to educate at-risk youth about HIV/AIDS prevention), and she has an internship with a political communications firm. After college she would like to work at a nonprofit working with children and education. Caroline studied in Stellenbosch, South Africa in the Summer of 2008.

We went on a horseback safari in South Africa, and things got hectic. I learned about dealing with a crisis in a foreign country.

So the safari didn’t quite work out as planned. About 20 minutes into the ride we were going past the lake with hippos when one came out of the bush and started to charge. The guide's horse spooked, which set off all of our horses and all six of us got thrown. I landed in the lake, which was cold but good because I didn't get hurt at all. One girl was also mostly unhurt, but the other four had to go to the hospital. We had an interesting ride in a seriously decrepit ambulance during which the EMTs asked me if they could move to the US and live in public housing. The hospital was a private one, which was good because it was very clean and nice, but bad because they were trying to give us a hard time about insurance. Hadley’s arm was clearly broken and the other three girls were not in good shape, so I was the self-appointed obnoxious American who waved my credit card around and yelled...luckily it worked. Also very lucky I had an international phone so we could call everyone’s parents and pay for everything over the phone.
Eleni Fischer

http://elenisadventures.blogspot.com/
Eleni Fischer is a junior from Louisville, Kentucky. She is majoring in International History, with a concentration on Modern Latin America. While at Georgetown, Eleni has interned on Capitol Hill and is a tutor with the DC Schools Program. She chose to study abroad in Argentina in the Fall of 2008 because of its unique mixture of European influence and Latin American heritage.

I am so glad I chose to come to Argentina this fall semester. It has given me a chance to not only learn about a new culture and way of life, but put the stress of Georgetown and the uncertainties of the future on hold for five months. I have learned a lot about myself that I don’t think I would have through a normal semester in DC. I have made some new friends that I hope to keep for a long time, and gotten to know one of the great cities of not only Latin America, but the world. There is so much going on here that I feel like I have only really scratched the surface, but I have enjoyed every day, in one way or another. The things that made me red in the face one day have made me laugh the next. I have become even more patient by living here, but my punctuality and desire for day to day activities to be carried out without hitches are always present. Talking to Argentines and hearing their opinions about the current state of their country never ceases to amaze me, because they are always so open, honest, and usually forceful about their opinions. I learned so much in my classes too, they were all very unique topics that I probably wouldn’t have been able to take at Georgetown.

There are of course things I would do differently if I had the chance to repeat this semester (including better maintenance of this blog), but I am so happy with the way everything turned out and I wouldn’t change my experience for anything. I’m so glad that I got to travel so much, but still be able to spend plenty of time in the city and get well acquainted with parts of it. I will always remember these five months as special ones, a unique opportunity that I know I have been very lucky to have had. I am very excited to return to the US, but Buenos Aires and Argentina as a whole will always hold a very fond place in my heart and I would love to return sometime in the (hopefully near) future.

http://elenisadventures.blogspot.com/
Gigi Safazadeh

https://digitalcommons.georgetown.edu/blogs/inaf-gbs24
Gigi Safazadeh grew up in Houston, TX and is currently an International Politics major pursuing a certificate in Latin American Studies in the School of Foreign Service. Her focus is on foreign policy processes, particularly how immigration affects foreign policy in both source and receiving countries. She chose to study abroad in Spain due to the very interesting immigration policy currently employed by the European Union, and she has loved every minute of it. When at Georgetown, she works at Vital Vittles, a completely student-run grocery store on campus, is in the co-ed community service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega (APO), and has just been selected to serve on the Class of 2010 Senior Class Committee as the Marketing Chair.

Top Ten Thoughts Upon First Encountering the European Continent in General, and the Spanish State in Particular:

10) The London-Heathrow airport is the size of a mid-sized urban city. It is also ridiculously frightening

9) The Spanish “lisp” that I have been trying to avoid adopting has proven to be not that bad. In fact, I think I almost like the Madrid accent.

8) I hate the Euro. It looks like play money. And what’s the deal with all the coins? Those are HEAVY!

7) Spaniards party like there’s no tomorrow. Going home at 5 am is actually a decent hour, and maybe even a little early.

6) EVERYONE has Obamania. Like, it’s the first thing anyone asks once they find out you are American.

5) “Vale” is the most useful word in the spanish language

4) Beyonce transcends all cultural barriers

3) Apparently a vegetarian who doesn’t eat at least pork is unheard of

2) The Madrid metro is apparently the best metro in the world. If you don’t believe me, see the giant billboards with pictures of the statue of liberty crawling towards the madrid metro symbol for proof.

1) Being a Cuban-Iranian-American in Madrid is quite the conversation starter, as it turns out.
Layla Zaidane

http://laylainargentina.blogspot.com/
Layla Zaidane is from Larchmont, New York, where she grew up with two Moroccan parents and speaking English, French, and Arabic. Because of this background, she knew she wanted to learn more about the way different countries and cultures interact, and is therefore studying International Politics at Georgetown University. In her spare time, Layla works at the student run store "Vital Vittles" on-campus, plays Women's Club Soccer, and interns for a local public education non-profit, DC VOICE. In February 2009, Layla began her semester abroad in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Upon her return, Layla hopes to graduate in December and spend the extra time looking for a job with an NGO with a Latin-American focus.

Today I realized I had no idea what the date was. Not just the day of the month; no, I didn't even know what day of the week it was. Instead of being alarmed or upset at the total disregard I gave to matters such as date and time, I realized it was a sign of just how much I have adapted to the culture. At home, we live our lives on a strict schedule of appointments and deadlines. Here, schedules are just a rough guideline of when things can be expected to start, and nobody takes them too seriously. Somebody here once told me that the only things that start on time in Argentina are soccer games and movies, and I have yet to prove him wrong. The flexibility with which Argentines seem to live their lives is one of my favorite things about the culture - in a city of 3 million people, not a single person is in a hurry. You will never see an Argentine sprint for a departing subway or running for the bus. They'll catch the next one. It was hard at first slowing my pace down to match theirs, but once I did, I found it intoxicating. I’ve learned to enjoy the time I spend on public transportation, walking to school, or waiting in line. As an American, my instinct tells me I am losing time with these purposeless activities. As an Argentine, I’ve been able to see that it’s not time wasted at all; in fact it’s time very well spent, noticing things I might otherwise overlook and just generally finding some time to myself in this huge, busy city. Living at this more relaxed pace I have been able to more fully appreciate my surroundings and my abroad experience in general; I hope to keep it up once I get back to the US so I can see what I’ve been missing all these years.
Mariam Khan

http://mariamkhan1.blogspot.com
Mariam Khan was born in Los Angeles, CA but was raised in New York City. Mariam’s mom is from Iran and her dad is from Pakistan and she was raised in a culturally diverse environment. Mariam is majoring in Culture and Politics at Georgetown University and hopes to pursue a career in international development or journalism. While at Georgetown, Mariam has actively participated in Amnesty International and HOPE (Hoyas Outreach Program). Mariam spent her junior spring semester studying in London at the School of Oriental and African studies where she focused on development studies.

As an American when I thought about London I never imagined there would be much cultural difference. When I actually arrived in London for study abroad I realized that I was wrong. Though we speak the same language I would definitely say it has been an experience living as an American in London. Sometimes communication is even difficult, there have been many times where I couldn’t understand and they couldn’t even try and guess what I was saying.

Though there are definitely cultural differences between the United States and the UK I can say that studying abroad has changed me in some ways. If anything, I’ve learned to become even more independent than before. Going to university here, you have to be in charge of your own work and your own study time. There’s no one checking up on you, ever. Deadlines come and go and if you don’t hand something no one is going to remind you. The opportunities I’ve had to travel have also given me a different perspective. I’ve been to countries from Spain to Denmark and I’ve seen people in all of these countries, especially other immigrants, struggling to make a living and fighting to live in Europe for a better life. I realize now that the opportunities we have also comes with a responsibility to people who don’t have the same chances.

I’ve had an amazing time exploring London and as much of Europe as I could possibly see without spending all of my money. I’ve travelled by air, car, train, and even ferry to get to far-reaching cities. I’ve been to neighborhoods in London where people only speak Arabic and other parts where “posh” people live. It has been an exceptional experience seeing how communities can live so close to one another and yet be so difference. You can step into one part of London and feel like you’re suddenly in a different country. This is exactly what I love about cities and what I love about London. I’ve had all kinds of food, seen different plays, and gone to different cultural events all about thirty minutes away from my “flat.” If given the opportunity to do this all over again I would definitely take it with much less hesitation than I had coming here the first time.
Duyen Bui

https://digitalcommons.georgetown.edu/blogs/inaf-dtb22/
Duyen Bui is from Elk Grove, California. She is a junior in the SFS and majoring in International Politics with a focus on Foreign Policy and minoring in Asian Studies. In the Spring of 2009, she studied in Shanghai, China. Her interest of research is the current trilateral US-Sino-Vietnam relations, particularly in the areas of civil society, human rights, and democracy. Outside of school, Duyen leads several social justice and identity groups on campus. She is a fellow of the Institute for International Public Policy (IIPP) and the Patrick Healy Fellowship (PHF). After graduation, she hopes to attain a joint Law and Masters of International Affairs degree. She is undecided on her career path but is determined to remain committed to fostering diversity awareness and advocating for social justice.

My struggle to find a good balance between a Western and Chinese lifestyle is a main issue an immigrant faces upon their stay in a new home country. Finding out where you belong in the order of a new location is often difficult, and most immigrants find themselves pressured to completely adapt to a new way of life. This often creates a dilemma of extremes. On one hand you can assimilate to the host country’s culture with the risk of losing your own. On the other hand, you can isolate yourself with others from your home country, allowing you to preserve your old identity but preventing you from understanding the life of a country that is your new home. Finding the balance between these two scenarios is the happy medium.

During my stay in Shanghai so far, I am content with my ability to retain my identity while allowing myself to adapt to a Chinese way of life. However, living in a nation with so much American influence, it is easy to for me to become inclined to speak English and eat hamburgers or sandwiches, instead of speak Chinese and eat rice or 馒头 (man1tou-steamed bun). In these moments, I have to remind myself that I am in China to learn Chinese and understand a new way of life, and the only way to do that is to speak the language and put myself in unfamiliar situations where I can learn the Chinese culture through interactions with others.

The bike ride today is analogous of my own immigrant experience in China. Although I was lead by an experienced guide during the bike ride, I was still subject to the onslaught of lawless driving from cars, buses, and motorcyles until I reached my destination. Similarly, CIEE is like the bicycle guide in that the directors and teachers in the program can provide as many tools as possible to help me navigate Shanghai and be accustom to its culture. However, once said and done, I am still a foreigner who is weaving and dipping between obstacles in order to reach a home away from home. Placed in an unfamiliar setting I am forced to find my niche in China.

Studying abroad in Shanghai was my first experience in a setting where I had to live away from home in a country where I had little mastery of the language and culture. But the struggle to adapt to this new environment ignited the explorer in me, and as my days in Shanghai wind down I will miss this new home. At the same time, I am ready to take on a new worldly experience and I wonder where my next adventure will take me.