PREDEPARTURE REFLECTION EXERCISE: Setting your goals

Justify your plans for study abroad in relation to your academic career at Wesleyan. Your justification should be organized into three sections.

First, explain how your experience abroad will help you develop further knowledge and skills accrued via the program of instruction you have pursued up to now. That is, in what way has your coursework prepared you for your program of choice? How will you leverage your Wesleyan experience abroad? Language preparation is key for study in countries whose languages are taught formally at Wesleyan. It is also important for experiences in countries whose languages may be studied through SILP (Self Instructional Language Program). Equally important are the courses that prepare you for assimilation, that is, courses that have taught you about the traditions and culture of your hosts, or about the challenges that your host society is facing in the social, economic or political context. Explain how you have prepared yourself to be an engaged, informed, and sensitive member of your host community.

Secondly, set goals for yourself regarding your academic and personal achievements while abroad. Educators universally acknowledge that such reflections are crucial for maximizing the benefit of a study abroad experience and for achieving ultimately a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, especially if students review these goal periodically while abroad and recalibrate as needed. We encourage you to be specific, for instance, regarding the strategies you plan to adopt and resources you intend to use for achieving greater cross-cultural awareness. Student headed to a non-English speaking environment and especially those studying through the medium of a foreign language should consider the level of fluency that they can reasonably expect to achieve and they should outline the efforts they intend to make toward those ends. They may even want to consider how language acquisition and cross-cultural competency are interrelated. Whereas it is noble to dream of “speaking and thinking like a native,” in most cases it may be more useful to envision your experience as a path leading in that direction, seeking to identify instead the point along that path to which your commitment and focus might take you. In sum, we encourage you to reflect realistically on feasible goals and on the strategies you intend to adopt in their pursuit, understanding, of course, that linguistic and cross-cultural skills and knowledge are the result of strategic determination and effort and are never reached simply by living on foreign soil.

Finally, explain as well how your experience abroad will influence your experience, either curricular or paracurricular, when you return to Wesleyan. How will you plan to build, academically, upon what you gain abroad?

Be very specific in your justification. Avoid broad generalizations regarding the moral, ethical, or ideological value of a study abroad experience. We take your understanding of these benefits for granted. We will want to see specifically that study abroad is an integral and strategic part of your Wesleyan education, as it has evolved up to now and as it will unfold in the future, and that you have reflected seriously on strategies that you will apply for achieving your goals while abroad.

Applicants to Wesleyan-administered programs in Bologna, Madrid, or Paris: submit your reflection in the target language of instruction (Italian, Spanish, French)
Applicants to all other programs: submit your reflection in English