

**Department of Psychology  
Cultural Immersion Description  
Classes of 2018 and Earlier**

One required component of the Psychology major is the cultural immersion experience. The purpose of this component is to provide you, the student, with an opportunity to see the world through a cultural lens different from your own and, in doing so, to have a better understanding of the diversity of human experience and mental life. While the requirement was conceived as entailing academic-year study abroad, we do allow students to petition for alternative experiences. Anything other than academic-year study abroad however, must be submitted by petition. Described here are the broad types of cultural immersion experiences available to you, answers to some frequently asked questions, and additional details about the process of indicating your cultural immersion plans.

**Types of Cultural Immersion Experiences**

**Academic-Year Study Abroad (standard expectation)**

Academic-year study abroad refers to spending a college semester (usually in the junior year) attending college in another country through a Wesleyan-approved study abroad program. This is the standard mechanism for satisfying the cultural immersion requirement. One need not take psychology courses while abroad, though many students do. No departmental petition or preapproval is required to satisfy the cultural immersion requirement through an academic-year study abroad experience (though preapproval is needed to transfer specific courses taken abroad towards the major). See the Office of International Studies (<http://www.wesleyan.edu/ois/>) for further information about study abroad opportunities. To fulfill the requirement with Academic-Year Study Abroad, simply indicate your intention when you submit your Cultural Immersion Declaration Form to the Psychology Department.

**Summer/Winter Break Abroad (by petition)**

Summer abroad refers to spending time in the summer in another country engaged in an organized, productive activity for a sustained period. Vacationing would not satisfy the requirement but living and working abroad, enrolling in an educational program of study, living with a local family, or serving with a volunteer organization, would be appropriate. The Office of International Studies (<http://www.wesleyan.edu/ois/>) offers information about a variety of programs. To fulfill the requirement with a Summer/Winter Break Abroad experience, submit the petition portion of the Cultural Immersion Declaration Form to the Department of Psychology for preapproval, and provide documentation of the experience to the Psychology Department upon your return.

## **Domestic Immersion (by petition)**

Students may fulfill the requirement by immersing themselves in a culture other than their own within the United States. A different culture than one's own, as used here, refers to a context in which the beliefs and knowledge that inform fundamental aspects of behavior in a community are different from one's own. Domestic immersion experiences that have been approved include intensive interactions with individuals of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic or religious identity different from one's own. As with summer abroad experiences, domestic immersion experiences must be rooted in organized, productive activity for a sustained time period. The Center for Community Partnerships (<http://www.wesleyan.edu/ccp/>) offers information about work and volunteer opportunities in the Middletown community and beyond, some of which might be appropriate as part of a cultural immersion experience. To fulfill the requirement with a Domestic Immersion experience, submit the petition portion of the Cultural Immersion Declaration Form to the Department of Psychology for preapproval, and provide documentation of the experience to the Psychology Department upon your return.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Can a cultural immersion experience ever be counted retroactively?**

In some cases a cultural immersion experience will be considered retroactively if it was completed after matriculating in college but before declaring Psychology as a major at Wesleyan. A petition should be submitted for such retroactive requests, with documentation (e.g., a transcript, a brief letter from a supervisor).

### **What do I do if being at Wesleyan *is* a cultural immersion experience for me?**

Please submit a petition in which you elaborate on why this is the case. You may skip the questions on the petition form that are not relevant to your situation. This type of petition is most often approved for students who grew up outside the United States.

### **Can I get paid or get course credit for my immersion experience?**

Yes, your immersion experience can be something you do that is a paid job or that earns you course credit or that is part of a research experience. In other words, it need not be something you do solely towards the cultural immersion requirement.

### **What is the definition of a "sustained period of time" in another culture?**

We no longer have a set definition of what constitutes a sustained period of time, as it varies from experience to experience. However, students who petition to do an alternative abroad experience typically spend 6 weeks abroad in the summer, or 4 weeks abroad at Winter Break. Students who volunteer during the academic year typically spend a semester or year, for several hours per week.

### **What sort of documentation is needed for completion of the experience?**

A students could have a supervisor (*not* a staff person in the Office of Community Partnerships please) send a brief (one or two sentences) email to our department administrative assistant, Cathy Race ([crace@wesleyan.edu](mailto:crace@wesleyan.edu)) indicating that the student worked this job (stating number of weeks and hours and the nature of the project) Alternatively, the student could submit a one paragraph description written by the student of her/his experience and what was learned from it. Other forms of reasonable documentation would be a certificate or grade report or even plane tickets.

### **How do I enter the experience into my Major Certification Form?**

If you went abroad during an academic semester, simply write the location and semester in the text box under Cultural Immersion (e.g., “Madrid Fall 2012”). You need do nothing else, and should *not* request an override for this in that it is the standard activity.

If you did an alternative experience, you should write nothing at all in the Cultural Immersion text box. Rather, once you have submitted documentation to Cathy Race in the Psychology Department that you have completed the experience, we will ask the Registrar’s Office to insert text on your form indicating that you completed the experience. You will not need to do anything yourself on the form.

### **How often are petitions not approved?**

Petitions are sometimes sent back for additional information, so please be as thorough as possible. In general, the Department makes every effort to work with you to approve reasonable proposals that fit within your broader educational goals. We expect you to develop such a proposal and to make a thoughtful and compelling argument for it.

## **Cultural Immersion Declaration Process**

It is difficult to fulfill this requirement without advanced planning. For obvious reasons, the Department does not wish for you to be in the situation of not completing the major because you did not plan far enough in advance. It is for this reason that we have implemented the follow process by which we ask you to make your plans known to us. If you do not do so by the stated deadlines, we will ask you to drop the major.

When you first declare Psychology as a major, you will complete Psychology Department paperwork and submit it to the Department’s Administrative Assistant. At that time, you will have the opportunity to indicate your cultural immersion plans and, if needed, submit a petition. However, if you choose not to do so at that time, you will have until the middle of November of your junior year to submit your cultural immersion plans. If we do not receive your plans by this later time, we will ask you to drop the major.

All cultural immersion paperwork is submitted to the Administrative Assistant and you should contact her with queries about the status of your file. If you submit a petition, she will let you know when a decision has been made about it. Petitions will typically be approved/declined by the end of the semester in which they are submitted.

It is the Department Chair who makes the decisions about the petitions and all inquiries about the content of petitions should be sent to the Chair. Students are welcome to contact the Chair with specific questions about the immersion requirement. However, such contact is not required as the goal of the petition form is to streamline the process. Once the Chair has received your proposal, he or she will contact you if there are any issues so that you might work together to come up with a mutually acceptable plan.

**Cultural Immersion Petition Form:**

[http://www.wesleyan.edu/psyc/about/major\\_guides.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/psyc/about/major_guides.html)