Embracing Diversity: For Multicultural Students

Despite the fact that more and more students from the United States are studying abroad, research shows that the majority of those are white. While the Center has worked hard to recruit more diverse students, our enrollment numbers for students of color are only slightly higher than the national averages (with notable exceptions for certain programs or certain years). Therefore, students of color are still in the minority within most of our groups. As a result, they sometimes feel isolated or alone when facing some challenges that are completely different than those of the white students due to the ways in which issues of race and ethnicity are constructed and dealt with differently in Mexico, Central America, and Southern Africa from in the U.S.

Some former participants have said that their program led them to reassess how they identify themselves with regard to race and ethnicity while others have indicated that it helped them deepen the identities with which they arrived.

Many Latino/a students studying in Central America and Mexico report tremendous educational and personal benefits from exploring countries where their families have roots. Some Latino/a students feel that they are able to blend into the host culture. For many, it is a journey of self discovery and one of exploring their family's heritage. They often go back home with a new perspective of themselves as North Americans and their role as Latinos in the Americas.

While participants' overall experiences were very positive and life-affirming, they have also sometimes been very emotional. This is why it is important to have your support structures in place before traveling abroad. Your need for an external support structure may depend on the length of the program you choose.

The following are suggestions offered by former students who studied in on our semester programs:

1. If you haven’t already done so, be sure to reach out to groups on your campus for students of color and/or campus staff people who can provide space for listening to students of color. Students who were interviewed for this guide emphasized that these support structures are essential for having safe spaces to be able to process their study abroad experience with other people of color.
2. Talk with other students of color who have studied abroad in the location you're choosing. If you would like to talk with former students who participated in a Center for Global Education semester or short-term program, please contact us at globaled@augsburg.edu so that we can put you in touch with participants who have volunteered to serve as resources to future participants.
3. Be prepared to be identified racially in ways that may completely surprise you. Race is constructed differently and addressed differently in our sites than it is in the U.S.; it is not better or worse, simply handled differently. You may be asked direct questions about your ethnicity and the answer of, “I’m from the U.S.” might not satisfy someone asking you where you’re from. People from the host country may give you nicknames that you feel don’t reflect your reality.
4. Take charge of your education. While it is a tricky line between being a token student spokesperson and educating by example, trust your gut. If you feel moved to speak out, do it in a manner that feels safe and comfortable to you.

Check out some of the resources that have been developed specifically for students of color who plan to study abroad. Please also look at the region in which you are thinking of studying for more country specific information.

**Additional Resources**

* [Access International Education](http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/aie/students/)
* [The Center for Global Education Project for Learning abroad, training and outreach](http://www.globaled.us/plato/diversity.html)
* [Articles for and by Multicultural students](http://studyabroad.msu.edu/people/studentsofcolor/index.html)
* [DIVERSE](http://www.diverseeducation.com/IntDiversity2.asp)
* [Diversity Abroad](http://www.diversityabroad.com/study_abroad_guide/minority_discrimination_abroad.php)
* [NAFSA](http://www.nafsa.org/about.sec/coop_model_programs_library/education_abroad--recruitment/diversity_issues_in_study)