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**The GEO Intercultural Competence Orientation Program**

***Building Intercultural Competence While Abroad***

*The Council of Europe has identified* ***intercultural competence*** *as a critical skill that should be at the core of any international education curriculum, describing intercultural competence as “the specific attitudes, knowledge, understanding, skills and actions which together enable individuals to understand themselves and others in a context of diversity, and to interact and communicate with those who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from their own.”*

The GEO Intercultural Competence Orientation Program is designed to facilitate the process of cross-cultural awareness and adaptation of students as they live, study, and serve communities abroad. The program involves pre-departure orientation, in-country check-ins and a returnee program designed to increase intercultural competence and academic success through active mentoring, critical thinking and analysis, reflection, and discussion of the study abroad experience. GEO began partnering with relevant offices and departments during the fall 2017 semester and produced our first revised Pre-departure Orientation (PDO) program for students who studied abroad during the spring 2018 semester.

Increased intercultural competence provides students with a better understanding of their own world view, a respect for diversity, greater tolerance of ambiguity, the ability to suspend judgment while analyzing a situation, increased empathy, a more cooperative and flexible approach to problem-solving, and, of course, stronger communication skills. The ultimate goal of the GEO Intercultural Competence Orientation Program is to enrich students’ intercultural competence for application in their future academic and professional careers. The immediate goal is to produce students equipped to achieve their study abroad goals and arrive with an increased intercultural awareness in their new host country.

During the two mandatory workshops, students will broach the concepts of culture, culture shock, and intercultural competence, and they will be tasked with setting goals for their time abroad. They will also work with a career counselor and Study Abroad Advisor to identify how their study abroad program fits with their career goals, define their study abroad study habits and set their own academic expectations for their semester abroad. Finally they will review emergency procedures, staying healthy, staying safe and resources for getting better – both physically and mentally - when needed among other important logistical information.

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Each workshop is mandatory with possible make-up sessions or writing assignments offered when students are not able to satisfy a requirement due to extreme circumstances.

**Intercultural Workshop I**

Students give voice to their personal mission and goals for studying abroad through writing, discussion, and the creation of an action plan. Students are introduced to their new academic classroom experience and responsibilities. They are also given the tools to engage in volunteer, internship, and other career development opportunities abroad. Students are encouraged and empowered to take control of their Study Abroad program and personal outcomes. Presented by GEO Admins, a Career Counselor and Study Abroad Alumni.

**Intercultural Workshop II**

Students and Faculty discuss “What is Culture” using the Iceberg Theory of Culture, dive into common stereotypes and explore personal preconceptions about American culture and how they may be challenged abroad. Members of the Office of Equity and Diversity and the Office of the General Counsel discuss staying safe, how to be a good bystander, sexual assault and student resources abroad as well as at home. A counselor from Counseling and Psychological Services discusses culture shock and continued care abroad. The GEO Admins review all logistics from packing tips to accommodations to required documents.

**Visa/Required Document Submission Sessions**

Each student receives an invitation for an individual meeting with a GEO Admin to review visa application paperwork before submission as well as any other required documents necessary for entry. Admins follow-up with students before departure and check in while in-country. Italy students needing to pick up their passports will have a second meeting to discuss any lingering questions before departure.

**Student-Led Panel & Mentorship Opportunities**

Global Alumni present on a range of topics from health, safety, academics, night/drinking culture, volunteer and internship opportunities after having experienced the program for themselves recently. Students are also offered a Mentor before departure who is available as questions come up while in-country.

**In-Country Check-ins**

Students receive encouragement to use resources at the host institution and take part in extra-curricular activities arranged on site. The student’s GEO Admin and Student Mentor are additional resources.

**Program Debrief and Reverse Culture Shock Sessions**

New Global Alumni are encouraged to meet with the Associate Vice Provost of Global Education and the Director of Counseling and Psychological Services in small group sessions. These one-hour discussions give students the opportunity to reflect on all aspects of their study abroad experience and explore any reverse culture shock they may be experiencing since their return to campus. Resources are available from Counseling and Psychological Services when needed and opportunities to be involved as a Student Mentor are discussed.