

Integrative Cultural
Research Project

2007-2008
HANDBOOK
FOR PARTICIPANTS

Kalamazoo College Study Abroad Program
Center for International Programs
Kalamazoo College

An Introduction to the Integrative Cultural Research Project for Participants

The Integrative Cultural Research Project

The Integrative Cultural Research Project (ICRP) grew out of a task force that reviewed the study abroad program during the 1991-1992 academic year. The project was initially modeled on the ethnography project format used for more than a decade at Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana. During the early '90's, the study abroad program instituted the projects to facilitate greater cultural integration of the students into the fabric and structure of everyday life in their host cities. Over the past twelve years, the projects have expanded beyond ethnography to include field studies, internships, service learning, and community service. Bearing an academic credit, the projects place great emphasis on participation, informed by observation and more traditional research activities. The Integrative Cultural Research Project, as a component of the academic program of selected Kalamazoo-sponsored study abroad programs, must be completed by participating students.

Goals of the Project

The primary goal of the project is the more effective integration of students into the local culture, and the development of an ability to appreciate the cultural values around which local people organize their daily tasks, thereby facilitating the switch in perspective from “they do things this way...we do things that way” to “it makes sense to do things this way”. Other important aims of the project are:

- improved target language use
- increased understanding of the local culture
- firsthand experience with a facet of everyday life in the host culture
- opportunities for interaction with local people
- opportunities to apply skills and knowledge to a real-life situation in the host culture—that is, an opportunity to practice those analytical and problem-solving skills which are becoming known as “global/transnational competence”

In its case study on international education in the United States and Japan, Towards Transnational Competence, (1997), the Institute of International Education identifies six core elements of transnational competence. These include the ability to imagine, analyze, and creatively address the potential of local economies/cultures; knowledge of commercial, technical, and cultural developments in a variety of locales; an awareness of key leaders and ability to engage such leaders in useful dialogue; an understanding of local customs and negotiating strategies; facility in English and at least one other major language; and facility with computers and technical skills in business, law, public affairs and/or technology, and an awareness of their different nature in different cultural contexts. The Integrative Cultural Research Project offers Kalamazoo students an extraordinary experiential opportunity to acquire practice with these competencies.

As an experiential learning opportunity, the project consists of two major segments—the field experience and the reflective essay. In the field placement, each student works under the supervision of a mentor and keeps a journal of field notes. You will also meet regularly, individually and as a group, with the project coordinator to discuss your progress and to share insights gained from your field-work. As the projects take on an increased “local flavor,” you should become increasingly independent as you implement your

project activities. At the end of the field experience, you will write a reflective essay on your experiences and begin to develop some initial hypotheses about the significance and/or linkages of your activity within the larger culture.

Fundamental Elements of the Project

The name of the project comes from its four components—“Integrative” stresses the fact that academic staff members on site encourage students to undertake projects which provide extensive interaction and integration with local people, addressing local needs through local means. “Cultural” refers to the opportunity for students to expand their understanding of the local culture on a multilevel basis and from a host culture perspective, while consciously limiting the influence of the student’s own culture. “Research” emphasizes the importance of conducting the project in a systematic and methodical way with a level of objectivity. “Project” highlights the four (4) distinct requirements that form the basis of the final grade.

The project emphasizes “hands on” personal interaction with a specific facet of the local host culture and residents engaged in that activity. Independent choice of the project topic and appropriate methodology for the research involved are integrated with the necessary academic and cultural support through regular meetings between the student and the project coordinator on site. Systematic research, consistent field note-taking coupled with careful interpretation, and interpretation of cultural insights at the micro and macro levels provide the basis for the reflective essay prepared by the student at the conclusion of the project.

Project Guidelines for Participants

While on study abroad, you will complete an Integrative Cultural Research Project that will form a part of the credited academic work you are required to complete during your study abroad program. The project will provide an opportunity to get involved independently and systematically in the local culture while you're abroad. Through that involvement, you'll be able to widen your circle of acquaintances, improve your mastery of the local language outside the classroom, and broaden your understanding of the host culture. Your project will allow you to explore a topic that is of special interest to you. Support for your project will come through the local project coordinator who is familiar with and sensitive to the host culture and prepared to assist you with appropriate selection and implementation of your project.

Six distinctive features characterize the ICRP projects, regardless of where they are completed, and should guide you in the selection and implementation of your particular project—

(1) **Emphasis on “hands on” human interaction**—your project should allow you to interact with local people outside of the usual academic environment in a systematic, integrated way. Methods of information gathering will vary, and where appropriate, library research may complement or precede your field work. You are expected, however, to engage in some form of experiential activity beyond the classroom or library regardless of the methods you choose to conduct your project—whether through interviews, conversations, or observations.

(2) **Choice of the project topic, type, and scope**—the project should reflect your own goals, interests, and skills. Although you will need to consult with the local project coordinator who will ultimately approve your topic, you may exercise wide latitude in selecting the sort of project you wish to pursue in the host city. A particularly effective project should give you an opportunity to apply what you are experiencing to your academic experience, to reflect on what you are learning and experiencing during the project, to interact with a diverse group of people within the local culture, and help you contribute to meeting a need within the local community. Given the project's aim to provide an opportunity for you to get involved at a more profound level in the local host culture, we encourage you to choose a project which helps you to investigate a topic of interest to you but also helps to expose you to a local issue or service need identified by the local community. You might, for example, choose from among these common project types:

- **Service and volunteer projects**—lending voluntary support to a group or some larger organization involved in providing a service to the local population. The time allotted for your field work is often too short to permit you to undertake anything comparable to an in-depth internship, but you may discover that by making yourself available to meet an organizational need you can more easily gain access to an institution of interest. For example, students interested in studying local schools might offer to serve once or twice a week as a teacher's aid in teaching English, while those interested in studying immigrants might volunteer to work in a refugee assistance center. Many nongovernmental organizations and local agencies may welcome your contribution while you learn more about how they operate in their particular cultural and social environment.
- **Cultural Internships**—participation in some facet of the local culture, such as practicing with local sports team, working in a library or shop or in the market, singing in a choir, playing in a musical ensemble, participating in a religious or civic organization.

- **Life histories**—study of the life history, or an especially-interesting portion of the life history, of a group of individuals. For example, you might interview members of the older generation about their experiences of war or social change; or you might speak with a sample of mothers, both young and old, about their experiences of childbirth. Be advised, however, that simply talking to individuals about their lives does not constitute a “life history.” Life histories should give some sense of the broad developments and main events in an individual’s life, beginning at an early age, with particular attention to details which relate to the subject or topic you’re researching.

(3) **Choice of methodology**—in consultation with the project coordinator, you’ll have wide latitude with respect to the information-gathering method(s) you choose to employ in your project. We encourage you to be creative and combine several experiential and research methods which lend themselves to your particular project, such as—

- participation in an activity, organization, or event(s)
- informal conversations
- formal interviews and/or questionnaires
- apprenticeships
- volunteering in a service project
- photographs
- audio recordings
- library research to establish a foundation for the project and to provide background information

The particular experiential and research methods you choose to follow will be determined both by your language ability, where appropriate, and by the level of confidence you enjoy with the people at your site. Please be sure to exhibit appropriate respect and diplomacy when studying people, especially if you intend to photograph or tape record individuals. Any questions regarding appropriate methodology should be brought to the attention of the local project coordinator.

(4) **Systematic research**—although you’ll use one or more of a variety of approaches in your project, you must be systematic with respect to your information-gathering and interpretation. You will need to pay particular attention to:

- **Consistent journaling**—rich, day-by-day descriptions of your field experiences form the essential foundation for the interpretations to follow. Your journal will allow you to remember more of what you see and experience on a daily basis. It will enable you to provide the illustrative detail that gives human interest and credibility to your interpretations. If it’s to be productive, journaling (or note-taking) must be a daily activity, and, within the bounds of practicality, you’ll need to make efforts to generate detailed descriptions of what you see and hear. With help from your project coordinator, you’ll need to get notes in ways that are unobtrusive and sensitive to the local culture. Often this will mean waiting until after a conversation or experience to write your notes. The local project coordinator can also help you make your journaling contribute as directly as possible to the goals of the project.
- **Painstaking interpretation**—social life, noted one long-time researcher, is a “buzzing confusion,” and to identify the patterns that give meaning, order, and predictability to a particular cultural scene, and then link a particular scene to the larger surrounding culture, will require hours of imaginative, careful thought on your part. You should anticipate the challenge that will be involved at this stage in your project.

(5) **Cultural insight**—your project should enable you to gain cultural insights on at least two levels—

- **Insight into the particular cultural activity or aspect you've selected**—whether that be a hospital, a guitar-maker's shop, an open air market, or a local nongovernmental agency. The challenge is to identify regularly occurring patterns of interaction; generally prevailing expectations that apply to different categories of participants; perceptions or understandings that prove typical of participants; and/or recurrent patterns of what people like and dislike as they react to their experience. You'll work to reach hypotheses and conclusions (not evaluations or judgments) about your particular cultural scene or environment. You should reinforce these insights by referring to specific observations, statements, stories, and examples drawn from your journal notes that support your analysis. Avoid relying heavily on lengthy descriptions, however, and move beyond the level of description to that of interpretation.
- **Insight into the larger culture and/or social structure of the host country**—any culture has what sociologists call a certain degree of “integration,” which is to say that no matter what particular scene or environment you choose to examine, you can expect to discover in it the imprint of the larger culture of which it is a part. Every particular manifestation of a culture thus represents a window into the larger culture. To generalize about a whole culture can be daunting, but it can also be one of the most exciting intellectual adventures of a study abroad experience. When writing your final paper, you will ask yourself probing questions that help you gain an insight into the larger culture around you.

(6) **Advising and mentoring**—you will be working with a local project coordinator who is knowledgeable about and sensitive to the local culture. The local project coordinator will assist you with the following stages of the project—

- **Selection of topics and methods**—local project coordinators may use their knowledge of the local area to help you identify cultural activities of relevance to your interests, and to evaluate the practicality and appropriateness of studying such activities. You're strongly encouraged to consider your own ideas, rather than relying exclusively on those provided or suggested by the project coordinator. To help you get started, however, the project coordinator may provide a list of some cultural scenes, organizations, or activities that illustrate what may prove interesting or feasible for you to do. The project coordinator will also help you select an appropriate approach to information gathering.
- **Introductions and first contacts**—local project coordinators are often well-positioned to help you get started. They might help you directly with introductions and advice about how to make your *entrée* in a culturally-sensitive way. Or they might know of a local expert in your area of interest who, in turn, could introduce you to other local people with whom you could conduct your project. It is your responsibility, however, to make the connection, not that of the project coordinator. Please remember, too, that these are personal and professional contacts and relationships of the project coordinator and the care with which you honor and respect them is of vital importance. You should not anticipate their assistance if you cannot honor commitments to appointments and to respecting this resource.
- **Review of journal notes**—either by working with you individually or through group discussions, project coordinators will help you learn to capture rich, relevant descriptive details of the activities in which you participate; to identify observations of special significance you've made; and to discern possible patterns within the social life you're studying.

- **Interpretation**—individually and through group discussion, local project coordinators can help you interpret both the particular cultural scene you've chosen to study and its relevance to the larger culture of which it is a part. Learning to understand another cultural can be one of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of study abroad, but efforts to generalize also remain a challenge, even for seasoned observers. Your project coordinator will make every effort to support your efforts to generalize and will remain receptive to your interpretations, while at the same time encouraging you to consider interpretations that may not have occurred to you as someone from outside the local culture.

Additional Information on the Role of the Project Coordinator

Throughout the various phases of your project's development, you will work with both the resident director for your study abroad site and, in many cases, a local project coordinator. The resident director will brief you about the project requirements as part of your academic program and be responsible for the evaluation of your final paper. At some sites, the resident director is also the project coordinator. The local project coordinator will meet with you to determine your project, review the prospectus you write, and approve your project or work with you to revise your project prospectus toward a more appropriate or effective project given local resources and conditions. Also, it is the project coordinator who will determine the weight of each project requirement in order to calculate the final grade.

The project coordinator will review your project with regard to your safety and security at the placement location and traveling to and from it within the city; the appropriateness of the placement to your linguistic skills and academic preparation; the appropriateness of tasks you are to undertake at your placement; and the appropriate number of hours per week that you are expected to commit to the placement or activity. The project coordinator will schedule required regular meetings with you and/or your group to review your progress and to give you an opportunity to reflect on your experience as it occurs. The project coordinator will also prepare a final report which provides an overview of activities during each phase of the projects, general reactions to the completed projects, and recommendations for future projects.

Specific Requirements for the Project

Your project will be evaluated and graded by the resident director and comprise one full unit of academic credit you are eligible to earn while on study abroad. Please review the following guidelines carefully as they indicate the specific requirements for the project and explain the four components that comprise the final grade. Depending upon your site, you may also be required to prepare a brief oral report to share with the group at the conclusion of your project.

The resident director will give you precise guidelines regarding the amount of time you're required to spend in the field at your particular site. The duration of your field contact will vary somewhat from one study abroad program to another, in accordance with local academic and cultural circumstances. You will typically be required to spend several weeks of contact or interaction with the people involved in the activity and/or cultural scene you've chosen to study. It takes time to become familiar with a particular situation, to develop the level of confidence with local people that you'll need in order to speak extensively and trustingly, and to begin to see connections with the larger culture. All projects will be conducted in the host city of the study abroad program under the supervision of the local project coordinator.

To receive credit for the project, you must complete each of the following requirements:

Supervision—as discussed above, you’ll work under the direct supervision of a local project coordinator. This coordinator will help you find and undertake a project that responds to your particular interests and that offers you opportunities to get actively and systematically involved in the local culture. You’ll be required to meet with your project coordinator on a regular basis, individually and/or with other members of your study abroad group, as you work through the various stages of the project. Before your meetings with the project coordinator begin, the resident director of your particular study abroad program will meet with you and the other members of your group at least once, during the on-site orientation program or thereafter, in order to discuss the project requirements and to anticipate any problems or challenges specific to your site.

Prospectus—early in the course of the project, you’ll be required to prepare and submit in writing a two to three-page plan which indicates the nature of your preferred project as best as you can anticipate at that point. The resident director or project coordinator at your site will inform you about the precise due date of this prospectus. The prospectus should include:

- the activity and/or scene to be studied
- your plan and desires for developing the project
- your suggested methods of information-gathering that should prove appropriate
- particular aspects of the activity that seem especially worthy of attention given the project goals defined within this document

Field Notes—the resident director will give you precise guidelines regarding the amount of notes you are required to submit to receive credit for your journal/field notes. Notes may be submitted in their original form (e.g., handwritten). Field notes should focus first and foremost on clear and accurate descriptions, rather than interpretations or evaluations, of people, events, and processes. Consider the orientation exercise on the “DIE” model (Describe, Interpret, Evaluate). Distinguishing factual descriptions from interpretations and evaluations based in U.S. culture may present a challenge. However, it is an important step if your notes are to avoid the use of stereotypes, broad generalizations, and comparison with the United States.

Final Paper—the project will culminate in the submission of a typewritten paper of at least 2,500 words (approximately 10-15 pages) in length. Local resident directors and/or project coordinators may require a longer final paper. Depending upon your site, the resident director and/or project coordinator may require that you write the final paper in the local language but in some cases it may be written in English. Your resident director and/or project coordinator will indicate which is the case for your program. As indicated above, the final paper will consist of interpretations of both the particular activity or cultural scene that you studied and of the larger culture of which that activity or scene is a part. The final paper should also make use of secondary sources (e.g., popular press, newspapers, magazines) and appropriate primary sources beyond your personal experience (e.g., interviews) and include a bibliography.

Along with the final paper, you will also **submit an ICRP Coversheet** to help the Center for International Programs and the study abroad program document the type and nature of projects completed at your study abroad site. The coversheet is a one-page, typed document in English which provides the following information—

- your name
- your study abroad site and year of participation

- the title of your project
- the location of your placement
- the dates of your placement
- the name of your placement supervisor
- a brief (one to two-paragraph) summary of your activities during the project

You are required to submit your ICRP Coversheet along with your final paper, to your resident director or send it directly to the CIP. A sample coversheet is attached to this handbook and may be used as a part of the final paper.

Your final project paper and the project coversheet must be submitted to the resident director before the academic program concludes. The resident director or project coordinator at your site will tell you the precise due date as this varies by program. No credit will be given for late papers and no papers will be accepted from students after the end of the academic portion of the program. All papers will be evaluated by the resident director or the local project coordinator. We encourage you to submit the final paper and project report, as required, to the resident director personally rather than sending the paper through campus or office mail or leaving it with another individual as you are fully responsible for the timely submission of the paper.

A N I M P O R T A N T N O T E: Regardless of project topics, placement or methodology, the success of most ICRPs hinges on the cooperation and contributions of local mentors, project supervisors, interview subjects, etc. It is imperative that all agreements established with individuals, organizations or groups assisting with your project are honored. It is your responsibility to insure and verify that you have met any guidelines and requirements placed upon your project. Because the ethical conduct of each student has the potential to create or eliminate opportunities for students who follow, this is a responsibility for which Kalamazoo College can hold you accountable.

Guiding Questions and Organization for the Final Paper

Working with a local organization of some type is the most common project chosen by students in the study abroad program. How you organize your final paper will, however, depend significantly upon the type of project you undertake. If you work with an organization, the following guiding questions will be helpful as you organize your final paper —

- What is the main activity of the placement? What was produced?
- What are the goals and mission of the organization?
- Where does this particular organization stand in relation to similar ones in the city? In the region? In the state? In the country?
- Whom does this organization serve?
- How do people view this organization and its mission?
- What problems and tasks are to be accomplished?
- How was this done?
- How successful is the organization?
- What are the basic skills and knowledge needed to work for this organization?
- What would be a typical day or week in the organization?
- What were your responsibilities?
- What contribution did you make to help the organization achieve its goals?

Regardless of the topic or location of your project, the final paper should provide evidence of your level of interaction within the local community; a definition of your project and its scope; a review of the type of methodologies you employed to gather information; recognition of any assistance you received from the local project coordinator and your site supervisor (where applicable); descriptions of your experience based upon your journaling and careful interpretation; and a substantial discussion of the cultural insights into the particular cultural activity you selected and the larger culture and/or social structure of which it is a part. Your paper must also include a bibliography of sources consulted and interviews conducted. Be sure to keep a copy of your paper for yourself, too, as you will not receive a copy from the program or the CIP upon return to campus.

Questions?

If you have questions about the requirements for your project, please speak with the resident director or project coordinator at your study abroad site. Both resident directors and project coordinators have received a copy of these guidelines and their own handbook for directing, guiding, and supervising your project and are prepared to assist you as needed.

Sharing Your Experience in Kalamazoo

The Integrative Cultural Research Project you complete during study abroad has the potential to be one of the most engaging, challenging, and satisfying components of your study abroad program. We hope you will want to share your experience and results with your academic department and others when you return to campus. We look forward to hearing about your project and to providing opportunities for you to talk about it with other students and members of the campus community.

Center for International Programs
Kalamazoo College
June 2007

Kalamazoo College
Center for International Programs

INTEGRATIVE CULTURAL RESEARCH PROJECT COVERSHEET
2007-2008

Name: _____ ID #: _____

Study Abroad Site: _____

Location of Placement: _____

Project Supervisor: _____

Dates of Placement: _____

Project Title: _____

Abstract:

Examples of Integrative Cultural Research Projects

Host Country	Project Placement	Project Description
<u>Australia, Curtin</u>	Tour of rural and urban areas of Borneo, Philippines and Thailand	Responsible Parenthood: An Exploration of Demographic Profiles and Family Planning Issues.
<u>China, Beijing</u>	Civil Society Program, Canadian Int'l Development Agency, Canadian Embassy.	Worked with the organization in order to gain an understanding of the role such non-governmental organizations play in Chinese society.
<u>Costa Rica, San Jose</u>	Defensoría de los Habitantes de la Republic (The Costa Rican Ombudsman Office)	Conducted an evaluation of the program regarding the protection of human rights of groups such as the indigenous population, after working with the La Defensoría
<u>Ecuador, Quito</u>	El Laboratorio de Microbiología a la Universidad San Francisco, Quito	Participated in current research on leptospirosis, an infectious disease.
<u>France, Clermont-Ferrand</u>	Crédit -Mutuel	Worked at a bank observing many facets of French business culture and interpersonal relationships within the small business environment.
<u>France, Strasbourg</u>	<i>Vert Claire</i> decoracion florale	Apprenticed at a flower shop learning the ins and outs of the business while forming relationships with employees. Also researched the process of becoming a florist and flowers in France.
<u>Germany, Bonn</u>	St. Marien Hospital	Examined work at the hospital and the German healthcare system in general.
<u>Germany, Erlangen</u>	Adidas World of Sport	Interned with Adidas, learning marketing techniques and strategic planning.

Examples of Integrative Cultural Research Projects		
Host Country	Project Placement	Project Description
<u>Japan, Hikone</u>	Itohan Wagashi Shop	Apprenticeship creating and selling Japanese sweets. Explored the cultural value of the pursuit of perfection and honor and its expression in the confection industry.
<u>Kenya, Nairobi</u>	COT Programme of ANNPCAN Regional Office.	Studied ANPPCAN's community organizer's training program and how it develops long lasting community based organizations in Kibera, a slum in Nairobi.
<u>Mexico, Oaxaca</u>	The city of Monte Albán	Worked with directors of archaeological site compiling educational material for Mexican children about history and facts of area.
<u>Sénégal, Dakar,</u>	Silversmith Apprenticeship	Learned to craft jewelry and examined cultural and social stratification and the class system based on family profession.
<u>Spain, Caceres</u>	Casa de la Mujer	Volunteered at a center for battered women and their children. Researched domestic violence in the area and interviewed women and educators.
<u>Spain, Madrid</u>	Instituto Isaac Newton	Studied the changes that have occurred in the educational system since dictatorship of Franco. Observed Latin and art history classrooms.
<u>Thailand, Chiang Mai</u>	Health Project for Tribal People's Daycare Center	Volunteered at center, examined barriers to education faced by Lahu and Akha Slum residents and their children and benefits of daycare.

KALAMAZOO COLLEGE
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS
1200 Academy Street
Kalamazoo, MI 49006 U.S.A.
Phone: 269.337.7133
Fax: 269.337.7400
Email: cip@kzoo.edu