

Top Ten Tips for Creating Faculty-Led Immersions



- ❖ Pick an immersion location that you are interested in and are at least somewhat familiar with, but make sure the course content reflects, not only the subject, but the location of the class. What does teaching the course in this location add to the content? If the class is something that could just be taught in San Francisco with zoom, you are not doing enough to integrate place and content.
- ❖ Start planning early (at least a year in advance). Find good in-country partners. Most are flexible and will build upon and/or incorporate your ideas and learning goals. Also, begin working with CGE and risk management early, particularly if your itinerary will include any activities that carry risks (long hikes, kayaking, swimming).
- ❖ Plan to meet with your students a few times before the program begins. This will build rapport and allow the students to get to know you and each other; it also helps you to set the stage and develop expectations before you leave. It is also a good time to talk about cultural differences and give the students a sense of what to expect.
- ❖ Develop a balance between the academic and the experiential and when in doubt, experience over lecture. Short-term immersions are academic courses, so there should be assignments that reflect the CLOs, but also allow time for more open exploration of the immersion location and lots of reflection on the experience. Many faculty assign reflection journals with some prompts and some open journaling.
- ❖ Set clear policies for students and stick to them. Follow the guidelines of CGE and the university (students must always use the buddy system, curfew, no drugs, certain activities are prohibited – like bungee jumping). Also set behavioral expectations; immersions are small groups, so talk about inclusivity and not leaving anyone out.
- ❖ Build down-time into the schedule. Do not fill the schedule all day, every day. Give the students time to explore on their own and you will need some quiet time to yourself as well.
- ❖ Be flexible and have back-up plans. It is travel, there is always something that happens to change the plans (weather, train strikes, illness). The more prepared you are ahead of time, the easier it will be. Also, make it clear to students from the beginning that changes are likely during the program and that flexibility and adaptability are crucial skills for global engagement.
- ❖ Be budget-minded in your planning to keep the costs reasonable for students. If an activity is really important to you, build it in to the program fee, rather than make it optional. Optional activities may make students who have less money feel left out.
- ❖ Build as many interactions with local communities as possible into your immersion. As part of your pre-departure orientations, talk to students about the best ways to engage with local communities to be a good guest and not an ‘ugly’ tourist.
- ❖ Schedule a final reflection session with the students a few weeks after your return (or at the beginning of the fall semester if you go in the summer). It gives a sense of completion to the program and provides a different perspective after being home for a few weeks.

Immersions Faculty Mentors

All of the faculty listed below have created and led immersions and are willing to discuss your ideas for creating your own programs. For question concerning logistics, in-country partners, and the application process, please contact Sharon Li (lis@usfca.edu) or Anastasia Vrachnos (avrachnos@usfca.edu) in the Office of International Initiatives.

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We are also in the process of building a bibliography of materials that may be useful for your immersions, including articles on cultural competency, studying abroad in a culturally sensitive way, building global citizenship into courses, and related topics. Stay tuned!