



# Designing Holistic Study Abroad Experiences

Cultural Intelligence, Well-Being, and Pedagogy  
for Student Success

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# Today's Journey

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# Why Cultural Intelligence Matters

97%

of study abroad  
alumni found  
employment within 12  
months

90%

secured a job within  
6 months of  
graduation

84%

said it helped them  
build valuable job  
skills

Sources: IES Abroad, AIFS Foundation

## Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

The ability to gather, understand, and take actions to function effectively in multicultural situations and across cultural settings.

-- Earley & Ang, 2003

# The Four Dimensions of CQ

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## **CQ Drive**

Motivation and interest to learn about and function in diverse cultural situations

## **CQ Knowledge**

Understanding of cultural norms, practices, and conventions across cultures

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## **CQ Strategy**

Ability to plan for, be aware of, and adjust to multicultural interactions

## **CQ Action**

Capability to adapt verbal and non-verbal behavior in cross-cultural settings

# Our Study

## Design

- Pre/Post Survey Design
- Country-specific CQ assessments
- Qualitative post-experience reflections
- Paired t-tests with Cohen's d effect sizes

## Participants

- n = 16 students
- Short-term faculty-led program
- Sport & Kinesiology focus

## Three Destinations

### France (Monaco)

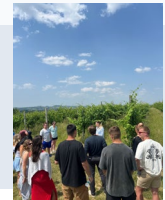
Mega Event management & culture

### Italy

Sport heritage & Agrotourism

### Croatia

University Sports, Sport Tourism, & Facility management



## The Primary Finding

# CQ Knowledge showed gains across all three countries

Effect Sizes (Cohen's d)

Croatia

**d = 2.24**

Italy

**d = 1.33**

France

**d = 0.99**

# Pre/Post-Test Results

CQ Dimension	Country (Mean $\pm$ SD)	F-statistic (df)	p-value	Partial $\eta^2$	Post-hoc Comparisons (Bonferroni)
<b>CQ Knowledge</b>	Croatia: 2.71 $\pm$ 1.46 Italy: 3.24 $\pm$ 1.54 France: 3.20 $\pm$ 1.59	F(2, 32) = 4.73	0.02*	0.23	1. Croatia vs. Italy (p = 0.01*) 2. Croatia vs. France (p = 0.17) 3. Italy vs. France (p = 1.00, N.S.)

\*Post-Test Finding: No significant differences between Croatia, Italy, and France on any CQ change score. Knowledge change approached significance, with Croatia showing the largest gains (M = 2.85) compared to France (M = 1.52). All three countries showed similar overall patterns - gains in Knowledge, slight decreases in Drive and Action.

# Pre vs. Post CQ Scores by Country

Country	Dimension	Pre	Post	p-value	Cohen's d
Croatia	Knowledge	2.58	5.44	<.001**	2.24
	Drive	6.60	5.98	.025*	-0.62
	Strategy	6.21	6.00	.366	-0.23
	Action	6.22	6.06	.453	-0.19
Italy	Knowledge	3.06	5.25	<.001**	1.33
	Drive	6.60	6.42	.167	-0.36
	Strategy	5.81	6.06	.423	0.21
	Action	6.34	5.75	.021*	-0.64
France	Knowledge	3.27	4.79	.001**	0.99
	Drive	6.67	6.25	.063	-0.50
	Strategy	6.27	5.92	.087	-0.46
	Action	6.38	5.75	.014*	-0.69

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  Highlighted rows = CQ Knowledge (primary finding)

# Making Sense of the Pattern

## Knowledge: Positive Increase

- Students arrived knowing little about their destination countries.
- Immersive experiences filled substantial knowledge gaps about cultural norms, practices, and local customs.

## Other Dimensions: Recalibration

- Students arrived with high confidence in their Drive, Strategy, and Action.
- Real-world encounters revealed gaps they hadn't anticipated: a healthy "recalibration".
- CQ Action - realized adapting behavior is harder than expected

## Key Insight

The "dip" in self-assessed CQ dimensions isn't failure, it's growth. Students developed more accurate self-awareness about what cross-cultural competence really requires.

# What Students Said

## Croatia Post-Experience Reflections

*"I do not feel 100% confident to function in Croatia currently as I only spent a limited time there. But, I do feel **much more confident**... I would say I feel 70% confident compared to only 10% before going on this trip."*

-- Student 4, on confidence growth

*"Croatia definitely felt like the most inviting country that we visited and I found it easier to talk to everyone... I would go back in a heartbeat and **feel confident enough to do so on my own** knowing how inviting the country can be."*

-- Student 8, on cultural connection

*"I feel most knowledgeable about the dance culture of Croatia **thanks to Damir**... My **willingness to learn and adapt** helped me have a good experience. As long as we made an effort to speak some Croatian they were pleased."*

-- Student 12, on cultural learning

# More Student Reflections

*"Going back, I felt like I had a **better sense of direction** than the first time I was there. Most people we talked to were very **willing to help** or just talk to you about anything."*

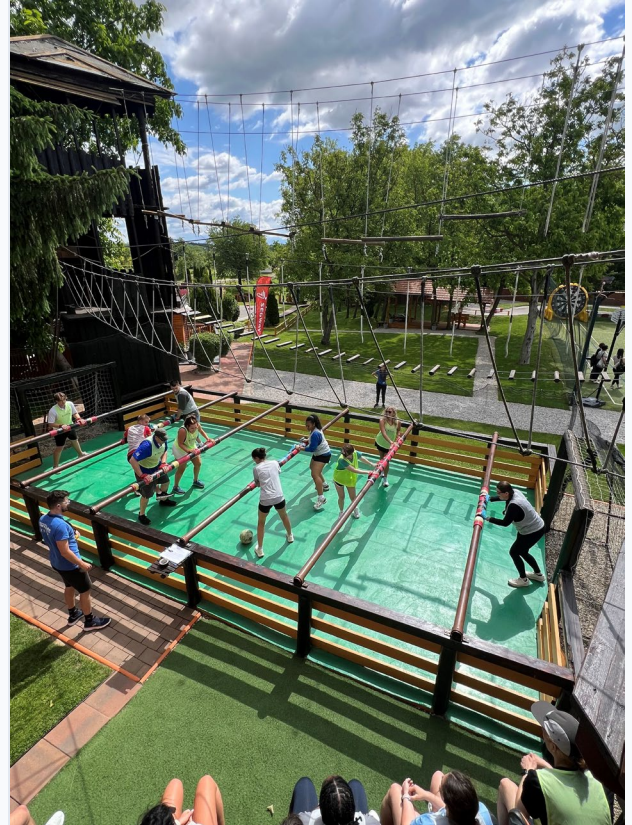
-- Student 1

*"One strategy I found helpful was **watching the locals** and how they acted and tried to **mimic** them. I am extremely confident I am able to **adapt** and function effectively abroad now."*

-- Student 15

*"Because many people speak English it was easy to ask questions... I **tried to pick up on words** like 'please' and 'thank you' since that is what we were saying most."*

-- Student 9



# Beyond CQ: Holistic Development

## Mind



- Boosts self-confidence
- Reduces stress through activity
- Develops problem-solving in new contexts

## Body



- Increased physical activity (exploring)
- Exposure to new foods & eating
- Break from sedentary classroom routines

## World



- Cultural awareness & open-mindedness
- Global perspective on industry practices
- Lifelong international connections

# Designing Effective Programs

What our findings suggest for practitioners

1

## **Pre-departure preparation matters**

Students arrive motivated but lacking knowledge. Front-load cultural content before departure to maximize on-ground learning.

2

## **Build in reflection opportunities**

The "recalibration" effect shows students are processing deeply. Structured journaling and group discussions amplify this growth.

3

## **Embrace the discomfort**

Moments of cultural confusion aren't failures--they're the learning. Design experiences that safely challenge assumptions.

4

## **Connect learning to careers**

Students report applying insights to current roles. Make industry connections explicit throughout the program.

# Building Your Program

## Location Selection

- Consider "emerging" destinations  
Balance familiar vs. unfamiliar cultures
- Partner with local sport organizations
- Build relationships over multiple trips

## Student Recruitment

- Market the CQ development opportunity
- Share alumni testimonials widely
- Emphasize career applicability
- Make financial aid/scholarships visible



# Key Takeaways

Short-term study abroad increases CQ Knowledge

The "recalibration" pattern in other CQ dimensions reflects healthy growth in self-awareness

Students report career applicability of their learning

Program design choices (destination, structure, reflection) amplify outcomes

Faculty-led programs offer controlled environments for transformative learning

# Future Studies

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## Examining English vs. Non-English countries

- In Progress
  - New Zealand and Australia\*
- 2027 Potential
  - France, Belgium\*, Netherlands
- Post-test collection to take place upon return

## Body: Health Intelligence

- Are there positive health impacts to a short-term study abroad?
  - Use bio-tracking devices
  - Track and monitor various health related activities
- Nutritional differences

Open to other thoughts, suggestions, and collaborations!

# Preliminary Findings: English-Speaking Destinations

CQ Dimension	Australia M	NZ M	p-value	Cohen's d
Knowledge	3.42	2.58	.089†	0.57
Action	6.09	5.59	.263	0.36
Drive	6.55	6.39	.320	0.32
Strategy	5.94	5.88	.703	0.12

†Approaching significance ( $p < .10$ ), medium effect size

Preliminary Insight: Shared language does not equal cultural familiarity, perceived cultural distance may matter more than linguistic distance

# Perceived Cultural Distance: A Consistent Pattern

*Students rated cultural knowledge lower for "unfamiliar" destinations — regardless of language*

## European Trip (n=17)

"Familiar": Italy (3.24), France (3.20)

"Unfamiliar": Croatia (2.71)

## Oceania Trip (n=11)

"Familiar": Australia (3.42)

"Unfamiliar": New Zealand (2.58)

Language is not the driver, both English-speaking destinations (AUS/NZ) and non-English destinations (Europe) showed the same pattern

## Possible Implications to investigate:

- Media exposure and tourism narratives may shape perceived cultural familiarity
- Pre-departure preparation should address perceived (not just actual) cultural distance
- "Exotic" locations may require additional cultural preparation despite similar CQ gains



**On discute ? | Parliamo | Hablemos  
Lass uns quatschen | 이야기하자**

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