

Navigating Identity Abroad

Understanding your Identity Abroad

While preparing for your ISEP journey abroad, we recommend reflecting on your own personal **intersectional identities** and how they may be perceived or accepted in your host country's cultural landscape. Understanding your own identity will help you prepare to navigate new cultural norms, build friendships, and connect to others in your new community. Below, we have outlined a few tips and resources that will help you reflect on your own intersectional identities while you're abroad.

What are intersectional identities and why are they important?

Intersectionality is defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw as “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of advantage, success, discrimination or disadvantage.” One significant way to distinguish identities is by differentiating **visible** and **invisible** identities. See below for a list of some of the major identity categories that you may identify with. You can also visit our [Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility page](#) to view further resources on these identities. If these identities & concepts are unfamiliar to you, we encourage you to ask ISEP staff or conduct your own research if you have questions.

Visible Identities:

- Race/Ethnicity
- Gender Expression
- Mobility Ability

Invisible Identities:

- Sexual Orientation
- Religious Affiliation/ Spirituality
- First Generation Students
- Heritage Seekers
- Social Class

Other individual considerations...

- Political affiliation
- Dietary Restrictions
- Attire

For many students, your time abroad can be a period of great change and important self-reflection. Your own personal identities, visible and invisible, may have a great impact on your experience in your host country. To help you prepare, we've developed a set of questions to guide you in reflecting upon your own personal identity and how it may impact your time abroad. This activity can be done individually, with a friend or fellow ISEP student, or even with a trusted university coordinator or ISEP Student Services Officer.

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Before you go abroad

- How do I self-identify?
 - (ex. What [personal pronouns](#) do I use? How would I describe my racial identity?)
 - How do you identify yourself in your native language vs. your host language?
- How is this identity accepted, tolerated, or treated in my home country's culture?
- What aspects of my identity do I feel most comfortable in?
- What aspects of my identity am I still learning about?
- How will my identity be treated or viewed in my host country? (ex. Are there laws or policy restrictions that could impact my identity abroad?)

While you are abroad

- Is this identity regarded or understood the same way in my host country? (ex. African-American individuals may find their racial identity is understood differently in many countries on the African continent).
- What considerations should I have when expressing my identity abroad? (ex. is there a place that I can practice my religion close to my host campus?)
- Do I have a close friend or group of friends that I can feel comfortable with expressing my identity openly and freely?
- Are there certain opportunities that are offered OR not offered to me because of my identity abroad?

When you're headed home

- Has my perception of my self-identity changed? Do I identify differently?
- Has my understanding of identities different than mine been altered due to what I experienced during my time abroad?
- What's the current social/political climate in my home country? What has been going on in my absence?

Returning Home

Study abroad students often finish their program expressing a renewed sense of self or a deeper understanding of how their identity fits into a larger, global perspective. As you take some time to reflect on your experience abroad, take stock in the ways your worldview may have changed and your sense of self may have been altered. If you have any questions about how to navigate your identity abroad, please remember to review the resources on our [Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility](#) page, or reach out to your Student Services Officer. ISEP also has a Diversity and Inclusion taskforce that actively engages with topics related to student identity issues and inclusion efforts in our programming.

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OTHER RESOURCES

General D&I Resources

- [“So you’re an American?”](#)
 - This resource provides an overview of common American Cultural understandings, cross-cultural communication, and tips for Americans who may be interested in traveling abroad
- [Fund for Education Abroad](#)
 - These are financial resources for Under-Represented Students in US Study Abroad and the available funds change every year.
- [Global Equity and Inclusion Guidelines](#)
 - These are the gold standard for international inclusion guidelines and are supplemented by a range of member only options for Diversity Abroad
- [Culture and Diversity Destination Guides](#)
 - A variety of travel guides for specific countries. The Diversity & Inclusion Climate section provides information on how certain identities might be seen or treated in that country.

Commuter Student Resources

- [Commuter Student Fact Sheet](#)
 - This is a resource that outlines tips and tricks that commuter students should keep in mind when deciding to study abroad and when choosing the right program for them.
- [Students on a Budget Abroad](#)
 - This article outlines the many ways for students to make study abroad affordable, including scholarships, grants, and using existing financial aid

Indigenous Student Resources

- [Native Partnership](#)
 - American Indian education fund, information for Native Americans.
- [Center for Native American Youth](#)
 - Center for Native American Youth, programs focused on education, social engagement, and support for students.
- [World Indigenous People’s conference](#)
 - The indigenous students’ education conference is held every year and gathers indigenous students from all over the world.

LGBTQ+ Student Resources

- [EqualDex](#)
 - An interactive map of the world that uses crowd-sourced survey data to report on the level of safety and progressive legislation regarding LGBTQ+ identities
- 13 Member ISEP institutions ranked as [best colleges for LGBTQ+ students](#)
 - A listing of 13 ISEP members who ranked on the American Ranking System, Campus Pride, as the best places for LGBTQ+ students to study, based on level of comfort, amount of resources, and advocacy networks.

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- [GLAAD Media Reference Guide – Transgender](#)
 - This is a glossary of terms to aid with the understanding of transgender and nonbinary identities.
- [Explaining Genderqueer to those who are not](#)
 - This is an explanation of the term “genderqueer” and how that may apply to non-binary gender identities
- [Transgender Travel Considerations](#)
 - The Transgender equality center focuses on compiling resources for transgender individuals who are interested in being abroad
- [TSA’s considerations for Transgender individuals](#)
 - The Transportation Security Agency (TSA) has put together specific considerations for Transgender individuals to lay out what to expect during travel
- [US Department of State Considerations for LGBTQ individuals](#)
 - The US Department of State has put together a checklist of resources as well as links to specific country pages to understand more about how being an LGBTQ+ traveler may affect your experience abroad.
- [The Global Divide on Homosexuality](#)
 - a report from the Pew Research Center, highlights 39 countries’ cultural attitudes toward homosexuality.
- [Man About World Guide to LGBTQ+ Travel](#)
 - A full comprehensive guide on considerations that LGBTQ+ individuals should take while traveling, including strategies to come out while abroad.
- [NAFSA Rainbow Special Interest Group](#)
 - The website has resources for professionals in the field and for students. The group has a newsletter, organizes events and shares articles. They offer scholarships and information about other scholarships for LGBTQ+ students.
- [Outright Action International](#)
 - This organization works on LGBTIQ advocacy and research in 6 regions of the world. They organize webinars and have the previous webinars registered and accessible on the website.
- [Barcelona LGTBI Center](#)
 - Municipal and public facility that provides information, advice and direct assistance services on sexual and gender diversity for the LGBTQ+ community in Barcelona.
- [ILGA World](#)
 - Another map with sexual orientation laws in the world. Its published every year with data collected from the State Sponsor Homophobia report

Resources for Students with Mobility Disabilities

- [MIUSA](#)
 - This organization works to empower people with disabilities to have international exchange and international development experiences. There are many resources on the website to support professionals and also US American students going abroad or international students going to the US.



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- [The Global Access Files](#)
 - Organization created by a US American with a disability who studied abroad. Provides practical resources for professionals and travelers with disabilities to handle disability-related issues while abroad
- [Wheelchair Travel](#)
 - Guides and advice for accessible wheelchair traveling
- [Foundations for Supporting students with Disabilities](#)
 - Diversity Abroad's guide for supporting students with disabilities.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity

- [Managing Black Hair Abroad](#)
 - A short guide on how to take care of Black hair while abroad.
- [Black Students Study Abroad: The Good, The Bad, The Weird](#)
 - An overview of what to expect and consider as a Black traveler and student abroad.
- [Studying Abroad As A Minority](#)
 - Things to consider for minority group members who study outside of the U.S.