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*The Study Abroad Experience: Developing Realistic Expectations*

My aim is to draw upon my own experience with Study Abroad programs to make observations I hope are of general interest. I have been privileged to serve at different times over a couple of decades as an advisor and administrator on this side of the Atlantic for various Study Abroad programs in Europe and on the other side as an instructor and administrator for some of the same as well as other programs. Because I rely on my own experience I do not cite the relationship of my paper to previous literature on this subject, while the principle of anonymity that operates for abstracts prevents me from giving as much specific detail here as I might prefer.

I address the challenge of developing realistic expectations under three main categories of experience: the ostensible purpose and/or project to be accomplished, the more general cultural/professional goals to be achieved (not least in terms of engagement with the host culture), and - in a category by itself - the acquisition of the host language. My focus is not only on undergraduate students, but on graduate students and faculty as appropriate. I address the concerns of participants from other humanities disciplines on all of these levels, which are broadly similar, though not identical, to those of Classicists, as well as of a category that might broadly (though not always accurately) be described as non-scholars, whose concerns can be very different from those of Classicists. I consider the impact of the economic crisis especially with reference to the second category.

Graduate students and faculty in Study Abroad programs tend to enjoy far greater autonomy than do undergraduates. This offers them more numerous opportunities in principle while it exposes them to greater risk with respect to the achievement of their project. I discuss ways in which attempts have been made with greater or lesser success to reconcile conflicting purposes regarding the first two categories given above, which involve a series of trade-offs, the terms of which are not all easily predictable. Unfortunately (in my view), in recent years the balance has shifted more and more toward an almost exclusive focus on the project. In a number of cases one is led to wonder about the very utility of the stay in the host country, which involves expenditures in terms of time and money regardless of what is accomplished there, not to speak of certain opportunity costs.

Undergraduates tend to be better placed with respect to their project because this is in essence imposed on them in the form of courses. All the same, it is a common source of disappointment - at least to those who serve as administrators and instructors in Study Abroad programs - to see what little use many students make of the admittedly meager opportunities available for engagement with the host culture.

The really bad news concerns language acquisition, though it is especially here that developing realistic expectations can be valuable. The challenges for acquiring or significantly improving a speaking facility in the host language are virtually if not actually impossible for the vast majority of participants hailing from the U.S., unless they are fluent upon arrival. The precise nature of these challenges can vary. Staying in a country where your professional contacts speak flawless English means that you might not have much of a chance to develop your skills in their language. But the result unfortunately is not on the whole different for a country where the opposite is true. I explore the reasons for this. Under this heading the project is even more of a potential obstacle, especially insofar as it determines routine association with English-speakers in the host country. I offer some modest advice on how to exploit what modest opportunities might be available.