

The Global Visual Explorer - Capturing Images, Thoughts and Insight from a Picture

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BACKGROUND

Desired learning outcomes and pre-program goal setting essential for any study abroad program. Whether a full year abroad or a short-term experience, finding practical assignments students want to engage in is challenging. This is especially true when the time professors must expend to assess those assignments adequately is considered. We highlight a simple project with a strong impact.

Below we will introduce the Global Visual Explorer, an expanded and modified process used in Leadership Training by the Center for Creative Leadership (Palus and Horth 2014). The assignment requires students to select a photo. Then provide a three-minute oral presentation of the meaning of that photo about their reflections on their study abroad program.

Across a range of programs, we have employed this assignment in the short-term (10 days), long-term (10 weeks), undergraduate and graduate programs. Students present a wide range of thoughts. In every class this has been used, some students become visually emotional as they relate what they learned to their peers. Powerful! Feedback from students, faculty and program donors has been overwhelmingly positive.

Many programs require some diary or individual reflection assignments. With the written process, only the professor sees the impact of their reflections.

The Global Visual Explorer process requires students to share, using a photo as a prop orally, their varied takeaways when everyone experienced the same activities. It helps cement the learning that everyone learns differently and sees the world from their perspective. Before engaging in the movement across multiple programs, all reported that initially, they believed the task to be elementary, easy and something that could be accomplished in just a few minutes. Post-activity responses were quite different.

Going through my pictures brought back many memories and thoughts I did not know I had.

Trying to decide on one photo from the entire program that captured a transformational learning experience was very difficult. I found myself thinking, what do I want to share with others? How did that experience change me or those I was with? How did I view that culture before I left and since returning – seeing my photos.

I did not know what to expect before going abroad. I can now say I am more confident in what I am learning. Having to pick one picture reminded me of how many things I had seen and done. It also helped me better understand my pre-trip biases.

Based on my photo of local children, this program taught me I need to learn to live with others who are very different from me.

Studying abroad definitely took me out of my comfort zone. However, it has helped me learn the importance of the global environment in which I live.

When students are asked if the Global Visual Explorer should be required of the subsequent study abroad program from each class, the answer has been overwhelming – YES! The Global Visual Explorer presented before a written personal reflection paper provides more profound reflections in their written assignment.

THE ASSIGNMENT - GLOBAL VISUAL EXPLORER

Goal of the Assignment:

To capture students' reflective thoughts around two major questions by requiring them to go through visual remembrances of their study abroad program.

1. What did they learn during their study abroad experience, and why is it important to them?
2. What is their overall takeaway from their study abroad experience?

Photo Selection:

Students have one week to review their photos once back in the country. Students are to select one image from any they have personally taken, from a class pool, or any other source.

Directions:

After photo selection, students will put it into a PowerPoint slide. Then they are asked to reflect on anything they learned before, during, or after the trip. This includes pre-conceived notions that may have been changed by their experience abroad. Students are welcome to include anything from the class content, thoughts about what they experienced abroad, and what they learned about or from their peers.

This is their time for self-reflection. Students answer two main questions in their Global Visual Explorer oral presentation. There are no right or wrong answers.

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When to present to class:

Students are to make their presentation during the second-class period after their study abroad experience has ended. Or Students are to post their oral presentation with photos to an online discussion board one week after the program has finished. This is a graded assignment.

Time limit:

Students have up to 3 minutes to orally explain their photo and answer the two main questions and any insight they wish to provide.

Grading:

This assignment should have some overall grade weight. We suggest between 3% to 5% of the class grade. It is graded on a pass/fail basis as the content students come up with varies. Overall, the actual learning that has taken place is based on its importance.

REFERENCES

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