



Carleton College Off-Campus Studies

# How Will My Identities Translate Abroad?



## How to Engage in Challenging Conversations Abroad\*

### **1. Start with yourself**

Spend time reflecting on how you identify, what informs your opinions (religion, family, community, etc.) and consider which topics trigger an emotional response. Write down your thoughts and expand on why you think or feel the way you do. Understanding your emotional triggers before engaging in a difficult conversation can help you from retorting at an opposing opinion in a negative, unproductive manner. You don't have to accept or reject someone's opinion; but be willing to listen and understand where they're coming from.

### **2. Are you listening?**

Become an active listener and take note on information that you think needs further clarification. If you engage in dialogue with people that share different perspectives, listening to their opinions with an open mind is a great place to start.

### **6. Observe -- notice what's happening and consider why this might be so**

Consider what kinds of structures of more-or-less advantage might be in operation. Reflect on why this might be going on and what it means for people's lives. Who is present and who is not? Whose voice is heard most, what kind of person is more visible, and why? Whose voice is less heard, silenced, or missing from the conversation, and why? Whose image is reflected back at us more often than others, and whose image is invisibilized? Sharpening your observation skills and suspending judgement will help you learn more about your environment and its culture while keeping an open mind.

### **3. Embrace the Uncomfortable**

Don't limit your perspective on another person's reality by only engaging in difficult dialogue with people who share your identity, beliefs, experiences, and opinions. Having uncomfortable conversations with people that have varying opinions from you can teach you a lot about yourself. Sure, it's uncomfortable but discomfort can produce positive change.

### **4. Stay connected to your network**

While being in uncomfortable situations helps us grow, being surrounded by community is what keeps us balanced. Your community can help restore the imbalance of emotions that might have been reignited or created by a particularly exhausting conversation. In the midst of a busy schedule, your community at school and at home can help you thrive, not just survive.

### **5. Stay Informed**

No matter what your opinions might be, it's so important to stay informed. Though-provoking podcasts, credible news outlets, diversity and inclusion events can help you combat ignorance and become a more informed citizen in today's interconnected world.

## Reflection and Discussion Questions to Consider Before You Go

- How would I describe my own intersectional identity and experience of being me?
- What is my level of comfort with my identities? Are they likely to evolve in a new environment?
- How are my identities perceived in my host country? What kind of stereotypes are there?
- How can I research and understand power and control mechanisms that I am likely to encounter?
- How can I manage other's assumptions about my identities? Do I need to worry about safety?
- Am I used to being part of the majority at home but will be a minority abroad? Or vice versa?
- How can I construct supportive community/communities abroad?
- How should I react if I encounter violence or find something to be offensive?
- Can I count on my program's understanding and support to help me through any discriminatory incident I may face?

\* Adapted from [Diversity Abroad.com](http://DiversityAbroad.com)

[\*Beyond Guilt Trips: Mindful Travel in an Unequal World, Anu Taranath\*](#)

### Resources and Guides

[Diversity and Inclusion Abroad Guides](#)

[IES Country Specific Diversity Resources](#)

[SIT Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resources](#)