

Beyond Study Abroad

The Shifting Field of International Education

Working in study abroad can be a rewarding and deeply humbling experience; one that keeps you on your toes and far away from the temptation to keep things static just because “this is how it’s always been done.”

I started in the field when I was just 26 years old; back when ISI Florence was still called “The Institute at Palazzo Rucellai.” At that age, advising students on the best and cheapest ways to travel, where to find the greatest restaurants with the most authentic meals, and how to avoid pickpockets felt more like passing on useful information to my peers rather than fulfilling any sort of professional obligation. Of course, student advising in international education includes more complex topics such as culture shock, intercultural communication, and personal development, but I had been so relatively fresh off of my own experience that – for a while – my anecdotes were fodder enough for many of those conversations.

As time went on, this became less true; my own experience also became a little less relevant. Student cohorts would come and go, all remaining the same age while I got older and farther away from my first, life-changing year in Italy. Now, after 15 years in the field, I am no longer relatable when I talk about having to use internet cafes and computer labs during my first experience abroad. When I explain that our apartments didn’t have WiFi, and our phones were not smart, all I receive are slightly bored looks and half smiles or nods in return.

The fresh groups of students who join us every term bring renewed energy, shifting perspectives, and a clear need for adaptation. And, each new generation’s views, expectations, and goals for their study abroad experience dictate what areas of our services will be utilized, stretched, reimagined, and improved. It’s an opportunity to understand not only how the field of International Education is changing, but how the world itself is evolving.

As we are firmly on the “other side” of the pandemic, this has never been clearer. With the boom in post-COVID travel and study abroad participants came overlapping novelties in education such as online learning, AI tools such as ChatGPT, and a more widely accepted and less stigmatized view of mental health challenges and accommodations. As professionals in International Education, we are tasked with creating an integrated experience for students that considers all of these things.

While compiling and editing this edition of *Beyond*, we saw many of these themes of change, evolution, and adaptation present themselves within the articles selected. We hope this year’s collection can provide new perspectives in the field and inspiration to keep up with the ever-changing times!

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