

What to Expect Teaching a Summer Abroad Course

The courses offered through the Summer Abroad program are regular University of Toronto Arts and Science courses. Although these courses are to be delivered at a similar level to an on-campus course, teaching abroad presents several unique challenges and it is not possible to deliver an identical course to what you would offer on campus. Feedback received from previous instructors consistently indicates that course content and/or teaching styles may need to be adapted slightly. Based on this feedback, we have prepared the following information on what to expect from the students and site, and strategies instructors have used in the past to deliver their course.

About the Site

- Each site has its own facility constraints, e.g., AV, library, computer lab, classroom. The Summer Abroad office can advise you of the facilities available at each site. Obviously, in some cases the lack of certain facilities may well impact your course. For instance, if there are limited library facilities you may want to use e-journals, prepare an extensive reading package, or give students a pre- or post-program research assignment that would allow them to use the library facilities in Canada.
- There are often unexpected eventualities. Sometimes we are promised certain services that are not provided, or there are changes in local conditions (e.g., construction, weather, system problems, problems created by other visitors). Be prepared to be flexible so that you can adapt to these circumstances.

About the Students

- *Eligibility* - All students eligible to do a course on-campus may do one abroad. There are no additional screening requirements. Students registered with Accessibility Services or with health issues cannot be excluded from participation as this is in breach of Canadian law. We do accept visiting students from other Canadian and American universities on a letter of permission.
- *Credit/No Credit* - Students will be permitted to take a Summer Abroad course for Credit/No Credit (CR/NCR). They must submit their request by April 5, no requests after this date will be considered. In order to pass the course students must obtain at least 60%. We are not allowed to release to instructors the names of students doing courses for CR/NCR.
- *Level of Students* - Students are not better or worse than the students on campus. Do not feel any pressure to give good grades to a student you feel does not deserve them. There are a few students every year who fail their Summer Abroad course. What is critical is that the marks throughout the course are consistent. If your course does not have a prerequisite think about how you will manage a class with mixed backgrounds and what you will recommend to students with no previous experience in the subject matter to help them prepare for the course.
- *Behaviour* - Usually when teaching an on-campus course you are not exposed to the personal lives of your students, but on a Summer Abroad program you may see more sides of them than you are used to seeing. In Toronto residences students stay up late, drink, party, and can be noisy. When this happens abroad some instructors think that the behaviour is only occurring because students are overseas, but this is actually quite typical for residence life. Also, we require students to attend class, unlike an on-campus course where they can miss a class if they were up late the night before (so more students may seem a bit off in the morning than usual).
- *Student Problems* – Usually the On-Site Coordinator will deal with student related issues. It is important that any problems you hear about be reported to the On Site Coordinator or the Summer Abroad office as soon as possible. Given the intensive nature of the courses it is important that any issues be dealt with quickly. You may on a rare occasion need to assist us in handling a student issue. Rest assured that the Summer Abroad staff will assist you and advise you of exactly what steps you should take in these circumstances, but we do need you to be confident in delivering the message.
- *Attendance* - The Summer Abroad office asks instructors to take attendance at all classes and on field trips. This is important for safety reasons and it sends a message that classes and field trips are at the heart of the program and must not be missed. Any student missing more than half of a class/field trip must be reported to the On-Site Coordinator. Any student missing a class (or the majority of a class) without a valid documented excuse, such as illness, will automatically be withdrawn from the program.

Course Preparation Tips from Previous Instructors

- *Pre-Program Preparation and Post-Program Assignments* – Instructors may want to consider pre-course activities to help students get a head start on the materials, such as a graded assignment (contributing to the final mark), consulting with each student on their major paper so they can begin their research in Toronto before the program, or on-line discussions with students on course materials (contributions could be counted towards their final mark). We could also arrange an opportunity for you to give a lecture in Toronto, though not all students would be able to attend. For those students we could require them to review the lecture notes and meet with you before the start of the course or communicate with you by e-mail or phone if they are out of town.
- *Focus on the Applied & Take Advantage of the Site* – Try to design applied learning activities in your course to take full advantage of the site. E.g., for research projects perhaps students can survey local people, do observational activities, or use library/archival sources.
- *Class Format* – Most instructors find it best to give lectures combined with class discussion. Delivering the entire course as a seminar is usually less successful because the duration of the program is so short.
- *Readings* – Strongly encourage your students to start their reading before the start of the program. Less critical readings should be clearly listed as optional additional readings. Instructors have employed different strategies to help students get through a large volume of readings on-site, including having individual readings that every student does and other readings that students do as a group and report back on to the class. Reading packages should be produced by UofT Custom publishing as they have web request capabilities and can mail packages. Due to copyright concerns, we advise you not to use small copy shops.
- *Plan for the Intensity* – Most instructors find it better to have the course work heavier at the beginning, as this helps students settle into their studies earlier. Also by the last week students are busy preparing for their final tests and tend to have less energy than they had at the start of the program.
- *Course Website* – Access to the internet varies from site to site. Even if your site does not have good internet access you may want a course website (on Quercus) to post materials prior to the start of the program. We recommend that if you choose to accept electronic copies of assignments that this is done via Quercus. Also students must be advised that it is their responsibility to check that the instructor has received their assignment by the deadline. Assignments not received by the deadline should be given zero.
- *Assessment* – The majority of a student's final mark should be based on individual work (tests, presentations, or assignments) rather than group work. Four assessments are typical, usually three significant evaluation exercises and one smaller one. It is usually good to have a test or short assignment at the end of the first week or the beginning of the second week to help students focus on their studies earlier. Given the few assessments it is important that marks are consistent throughout the course. It is better to be a little tougher on students at the beginning so they appreciate what additional work is necessary for them to do well in the course. NB: work worth at least 20% of students' final mark must be returned before the program drop date.

We recommend that class participation not exceed 10-15% of the final mark. We also recommend you include explicit statements on what is expected in terms of participation, for example you can include on your course outline statements like "Attendance in class and on field trips is a basic requirement of this program. Therefore just being present does not in itself earn marks for participation. Rather, participation marks are awarded for active attention and constructive participation in class discussions, for clear evidence of having completed the assigned readings, and for focused attention and cooperative participation on the field trips."

- *Field Trips* - Have a reasonable number of field trips planned; having either not enough or too many can create problems. Make sure the field trips are fully incorporated into the course and that information covered on field trips contributes to the students' final mark in some way, e.g., through class tests or assignments. Avoid trips on Fridays unless it is an overnight weekend trip.
- *Guides* – For some sites guides are requested by instructors or required by the site. The quality of guides (both in terms of their knowledge base and language facility) varies greatly. Unless you request a specific guide that you know is good, you should not rely on the guide to convey the information critical to the course. Be prepared to communicate this information with students yourself.

We hope this information from previous instructors is helpful. We wish you a rewarding Summer Abroad teaching experience!