# **TIPS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS**

*Self-Discovery*

Studying abroad can be seen as a discovery of self and others. Because studying abroad is full of new experiences, please encourage your students to dig a little deeper in the months leading up to their departure by developing a growth mindset, increasing overall confidence, and regularly revisiting the skills they find most challenging, such as speaking up in groups. Helping your students prepare to study abroad can be extremely rewarding, especially once they return full of confidence and independence.

Helping students better understand how their identity may shape their study abroad experiences will allow them to make sense of and relate to the multiple aspects of the foreign language, culture, and society. Goldoni, F. (2015) provides activities to help staff help students "unpack" their cultural identity and backgrounds (p.7, Goldoni, F. (2015))[[1]](#footnote-2)

*Peacebuilding Skills*

As students prepare for international experiences, peacebuilding skills are invaluable for navigating new perspectives and building relationships with individuals holding differing viewpoints. Here are some essential skills students should prioritize:

1. **Reading Nonverbal Signs**: Research suggests that approximately 80 percent of communication is nonverbal. Effectively communicating entails understanding both verbal and nonverbal cues. Being adept at interpreting nonverbal signals enhances communication and fosters understanding.
2. **Listening to Understand**: Effective communication involves both speaking and listening. Active listening fosters mutual understanding, which involves listening and responding to others. By actively listening, students can gain insight into new perspectives while building trust and rapport with others they encounter.
3. **Understanding Conflict Styles**: Students must understand their conflict resolution style. Given that they may encounter perspectives with which they disagree during their time abroad, being aware of their preferred conflict resolution approach can help them navigate disagreements more effectively and strive for positive outcomes.
4. **Learning from Disagreements**: Encountering different perspectives may make students uncomfortable and hesitant to engage in conversation. However, disagreement is a natural and constructive aspect of discourse. Encourage students to articulate their viewpoints while also considering the perspectives of others. Students can deepen their understanding and foster meaningful exchanges by engaging in respectful dialogue.

By honing these peacebuilding skills, students can enrich their international experiences, foster meaningful connections, and navigate diverse perspectives with openness and empathy.

*Perceptions of an American*

As students prepare to travel abroad as Americans, it's crucial to understand how they may be perceived as representatives of the United States. As ambassadors of American culture, they might serve as someone’s initial point of contact with American society. Culture encompasses a particular nation or people's customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements, necessitating openness to diversity, class, and economic differences.

Being an American abroad carries significant responsibility, demanding sensitivity and tact. Various topics may arise, including politics, popular culture, and crime. In such instances, it's essential to promote effective communication, which revolves around understanding the other person rather than winning arguments or imposing opinions. The key lies in respecting the audience and employing active listening practices, such as encouraging verbal cues, asking questions, and refraining from judgment.

Furthermore, irrespective of their political beliefs or ability to influence global politics, individuals abroad might perceive each American as personally accountable for decisions made by the United States government. Consequently, as Americans hold preconceived notions, many preconceptions exist about U.S. citizens and their characteristics. Once again, students should be advised that part of being an American abroad involves approaching questions and conversations with an open mind, respecting the audience, and practicing active listening.

A group of women sitting at a table eating food

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1. Goldoni, F. (2015) Preparing students for studying abroad. Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 1-20.) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)