

**Preparing Globally Engaged Students: Evaluation of a Uruguay Study Abroad
Pre-Departure Curriculum**

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Introduction / Need for Research

Global education prepares students to navigate increasingly interconnected contexts by building academic, professional, and intercultural competencies (Fong, 2020). Study abroad programs are a key vehicle for this development, helping students analyze global issues, collaborate across cultures, and adapt to diverse environments. To support these outcomes, many institutions require pre-departure training, delivered through informational meetings, workshops, or online modules covering topics such as cultural awareness, ethics, safety, language, and destination-specific content (Boyington et al., 2025). Research indicates such training enhances intercultural competence (Cutting et al., 2022; Goldstein, 2022), is most effective when context-specific and interactive (Kalbarczyk et al., 2019), and reduces risks abroad (Kosman et al., 2023). Previous research has also demonstrated that pre-departure preparation improves students' ability to transfer classroom learning into field experiences (Kosman et al., 2023). Yet little is known about how students perceive pre-departure curricula in short-term, agriculture-focused programs, where technical content intersects with cultural and language readiness.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in intercultural learning theory and Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, which emphasizes how confidence in one's ability to perform tasks influences motivation and performance (Bandura, 1997). Pre-departure preparation not only builds knowledge but also fosters self-efficacy for navigating novel cross-cultural environments. Prior scholarship underscores the value of context-specific training in short-term programs to enhance both disciplinary learning and cultural engagement (Goldstein, 2022).

Methodology

An anonymous Qualtrics survey was administered to undergraduates (N = 11) participating in a one-week study abroad program following ~8 weeks of pre-departure modules (March 2025). The 12-item instrument included Likert-scale ratings, engagement rankings, and open-ended prompts. Developed with faculty input and informed by intercultural learning literature, the instrument was reviewed for content validity. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively in SPSS, and qualitative responses were thematically coded.

Limitations include a small, single-institution sample, reliance on self-report data (potentially leading to response bias), missing items, and the use of descriptive rather than inferential statistics. Findings are exploratory and context-specific.

Results / Findings

Quantitative results showed high perceived effectiveness across modules (M = 4.00–4.64 on a 1–5 scale). Land Grant & INIA and Cultural Intelligence & Things to Expect scored highest (M = 4.64 each), while Forage Management scored lowest (M = 4.00). Engagement rankings

highlighted the U.S. Beef Supply Chain (82%) and Cultural Intelligence modules (73%) as most engaging. Overall satisfaction with preparation was high ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 0.48$).

Qualitative themes included:

1. Adequacy of preparation – students felt well-prepared overall, describing the modules as comprehensive and confidence-building.
2. Need for language and culture-focused content – students desired introductory Spanish and clearer expectations for cultural norms.
3. Preferences for engagement and delivery – students preferred shorter, segmented modules, reflective assessments, and interactive activities.
4. Targeted improvements – students recommended Uruguay-specific case studies, alumni voices, practical readiness tools (translation apps, packing guidance), and visuals from past trips.

Conclusions

Students perceived the curriculum as effective overall, especially modules that were both destination-specific and interactive. However, gaps included limited Spanish preparation, static delivery, and insufficient applied content. Addressing these issues can strengthen intercultural competence, reduce stress during transition abroad, and enhance engagement with host communities. These findings align with Bandura's (1997) view that increasing students' confidence in their skills supports effective performance in challenging contexts.

Implications / Recommendations / Impact on Profession

This study emphasizes that effective pre-departure training for short-term, agriculture-focused study abroad requires balancing technical agricultural content with intercultural and language readiness. Based on student feedback, improvements should include:

- Introductory Spanish micro-sequences and cultural etiquette.
- Integration of Uruguay-specific case studies and alumni narratives.
- Microlearning design incorporating interactive elements and reflections, replacing traditional quizzes.
- Practical readiness modules (translation tools, clothing, currency, packing).
- Optional pre-trip meetups to foster social cohesion.

These findings contribute to global agricultural education by demonstrating how intentional, context-specific pre-departure curricula improve student preparedness, reduce adjustment stress, and enhance meaningful engagement abroad (Cutting et al., 2022; Kosman et al., 2023).

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