Preparing For and Choosing a Topic for Your ICRP

Your ICRP should reflect your interests and skills and meet the goals listed in the introduction to the ICRP. If you are planning to study on a program with an ICRP, you should review the ‘Past ICRPs’ compilation, which can be found on the CIP website at https://reason.kzoo.edu/cip/ICRP/. The compilation is a sampling of what kind of ICRPs are typically available at your program site.

If you are on an ICRP program, you are required to complete the ICRP Worksheet on Hornet Passport (HPP). The worksheet will help you brainstorm about how your interests, skills and experience might be incorporated into an ICRP. Your responses to the ICRP Worksheet questions should point to research areas you could consider for your project. Then, using the responses from your ICRP Worksheet you will create your ICRP Résumé. To assist you, refer to the CCPD’s Résumé Guide, which can be found on the Résumés page at https://reason.kzoo.edu/ccd/resources/resumes/. The CIP will share your ICRP Worksheet responses and your ICRP Résumé with the Project Coordinator at your study abroad site before your arrival so that she/he may begin to prepare.

Words of Wisdom from Your Peers

Students recently back from Australia, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Japan, Kenya, Senegal, Spain and Thailand shared some feedback with the CIP that we think could be helpful to you in getting ready to organize your ICRP. Their suggestions follow. Keep in mind that some of these ideas will not be appropriate at every program site.

Recommendations for selecting an ICRP topic:

- A topic might not seem appealing at first (like mine), but it will usually turn out to be a very rewarding experience.
- Choose the kind of people/organization you’d like to work with, not just the type of work.
- I would suggest that the students explore other options [other than a list of past projects] for their ICRPs, because it is a great way to work on presentation skills as well as practicing the native language.
- Pick whatever's available and don’t be afraid to email and call people/organizations that seem interesting.
- Don't be afraid to try to push the limits of typical ICRPs because sometimes it’s the slightly atypical options that are the most intriguing.
- Start looking and thinking about an ICRP about one or two months into the program. Ask the project coordinator for examples of past ICRPs. Do something that has something to do with the indigenous community or indigenous issues.
- Go with an organization that is easy and safe to travel to and that can offer you many hours.
- Don't stress out about it. You will figure something out; the school will help you find something you will enjoy.
- Remember to be flexible. Things won't always work out ideally, but you can still make the most of your experience, and learn a lot.
- Do what interests you the most but simultaneously is something you’d never be able to do anywhere else, especially at home.
- Do something that will benefit you later in life.
- Don't be afraid to venture out in to the community and ask questions about things that interest you or what opportunities might be available to you.
- Go for one that lets you be really involved.
- It can be a life-changing experience. Make it your own.
- Don’t pick something that allows you to interact only with tourists or ex-pats unless that is really what you want.
- Do interviews/hands on stuff. Don’t be nervous not to have a host organization, or to do your own independent idea.
- Your topic does not have to be conventional, make it your own.
- Start looking online before you leave, email places with start and end dates along with info about yourself and the type of project/topic you’re interested in, and utilize your resources like your study abroad advisor.
- Don't let yourself be bullied into doing something another student has already done.
- Plan and research ahead of departure
- Follow your passion

**Resources used to choose topics and placements:**

- I tried to do something new, but the places I contacted were not interested in my help as a volunteer, so I chose a place that people had worked at before.
- A list of locations previous participants had done ICRPs.
- I was initially encouraged to think of a setting in which I would explore Spanish culture to its best. I was inspired by a participant from the year before, who took guitar lessons. Being a creative person, I wanted to do a creative project.
- Our resident director made the connection for me.
- The Program director and the internet.
- Program Staff
- A list of organizations and the one I chose was the first one that was close to my house and could give me the hours I needed.
- School sources
- Other students with me on study abroad
- Teachers, and program coordinators
- My personal interests and knowledge given to me by past participants
- Host family, community resources, personal research/ internet
Project Coordinator
I like science and wanted to repay the institute that saved my life after being bitten by a venomous snake.
My interest in dentistry
Course leaders and their connections
We visited an ecotourism resort and I found it fascinating. I was wondering how well ecotourism fit with the ideals in practice, since it is a big industry in Thailand and we were learning about the sustainability ideals in class.
Fellow students (American and Japanese)
It’s a lot easier to get an in if you can work through personal relationships. Especially in South America, knowing people and making personal connections is the way things are done.
Emphasize going to a place where you will have real participation working alongside peers and have low expectations.

Suggestions for completing your project:

- Start early and keep track of what you do and what you’re thinking throughout the whole project, and what interactions you have with people. Detailed field notes REALLY help with the final paper.
- Choose something you’re interested in.
- Keep up with all of the journal entries and start the paper early, so that you don’t feel overwhelmed at the end of your program.
- Be assertive.
- Choose something that will allow you to really use the language. It sounds daunting, but it will be so helpful in the long run.
- Get involved, ask questions, speak the language, and go as often as you can.
- Don’t wait until the last minute to do your write up since it will only result in you being more stressed than you have to be about the project.
- Don’t expect too much; I had to change my plans about what I wanted to accomplish because I was too specific and the organizations were too unorganized. Remember that the idea of ICRP is to learn about the ways your host culture operates! Don’t try to impose too many ideas, and be flexible.
- Make sure your project site has work for you to do
- Just stay on top of your work and make sure you give proper time and thanks to those people that you work with or interview.
- Immerse yourself in the experience.
- Be timely at your ICRP site, keep track that you will finish your hours.
- Do it yourself. Take the initiative early especially if there’s no placement or help in place.
- Be self-reliant and enthusiastic. Don’t procrastinate on writing the final paper.
• Commit time to immerse yourself - this may be the only chance you get to do something like it. You get what you put in - you can make a meaningful project but only if you make it that way.
• I found it best to complete my ICRP after school was out and write my ICRP following the project.
• Make sure the institution you are going into actually understands what you need to complete the project.
• Make sure it gives you a chance to delve more into the culture.
• Pick a small topic! Don’t try to do too big of a research project, better to do a well done smaller / more specific one.
• Leave a lot of time for writing and editing you final paper!
• Things take forever to get rolling in Senegal, so even if you have a solid idea and an organization, you may not get started doing what you actually want until about a month or so after you would have thought you could start. Things just move slowly.

Students who have returned from study abroad often comment that their ICRP experiences were among the most engaging, challenging and rewarding aspects of their study abroad experiences. The quality of project experiences and essays typically depend on the time, thought and planning that students commit to this portion of the academic program. We hope this introduction helps you as you begin to explore your options for your future project!