**STUDENT PANEL**

**Best Practices**

Thanks for being willing to serve on a student panel and share some of your past experiences studying abroad! The purpose of this handout is to provide tips for what information to share and how to share it. We hope you find it helpful!

As you present your experiences, remember:

* Stories. Share your excitement and your stories but also remind and encourage future participants that their job is to go out and find their own stories.
* Encourage flexibility. One of the great lessons of study abroad is to cultivate openness to new, unpredictable experiences; so, encourage future participants to be curious, open, and flexible as their own story unfolds.
* Avoid absolutes. Remind listeners that this is your perspective and that others might have perceived their experiences differently.
* Provide resources. Make suggestions and encourage students to use local resources.
* Balance. Address both the benefits but also the challenges of studying abroad. Provide great stories, cautionary tales, and what the potential pitfalls were for you.
* Good Decisions. Encourage students to make good decisions ☺ -- You know I have to say this, it’s my job.

Possible questions to address:

* Academics:
	+ From your perspective, how are classes the same and also different from Calvin?
	+ What tips do you have for navigating the campus culture and classes?
* Living Situation:
	+ What were the dorms like?
	+ What was the best thing about living with a host family? What was the biggest challenge? Describe the range of host family options?
* Food:
	+ What food did you most enjoy? Any recommendations of must try spots?
	+ Any food you would encourage students to bring (e.g. peanut butter, CLIFF bars, etc).
* Safety:
	+ Did you feel safe during your time off-campus? What did you do to be more situationally aware?
	+ Were there any specific safety issues that your addressed (e.g. catcalls, drinking culture, political unrest, etc)? How did you cope or deal with these issues? How did the group deal with them?
* What to do in your free time:
	+ What was a typical day like?
	+ Did you get involved with any activities at the local university?
* Excursions and Independent Travel:
	+ What was the favorite place you traveled?
	+ Did you travel independently around your site? What do you recommend?
	+ Did you travel independently in the country or region? Any suggestions?
* Cultural expectations:
	+ What, if any, cultural miscalculations did you make? What did you learn?
	+ What are the cultural expectations around what to wear?
	+ How did you connect with locals?
* What to pack:
	+ What is the one item you left at home that you wish you had taken?
	+ What are two or three things you took that you wish you had left behind?
	+ What can you leave at home and purchase at your site?