

Developed for Building a Better World: The Pedagogy and Practice of Global Service-Learning (Hartman, E., Kiely, R., Friedrichs, J., and Boettcher, C. 2013) and available at criticalservicelearning.org.

Comfort Zone Boundary Crossing Assignment

This experiential learning assignment is best conducted in the pre-travel phase of a global service-learning course. The goal is to have participants practice crossing their comfort zone with regard to race, ethnicity and culture and reflect on the experience as a way to prepare for their GSL experience. Another goal is to begin a conversation about privilege, segregation and boundaries in our society – this conversation can connect to course material, group dynamics and experiences at the service site.

Below is a write-up of how one might describe this assignment to GSL participants.

Your assignment:

Visit with a group in your local area that you have not interacted with because it feels uncomfortable. This can be an event, an organization or a restaurant/social venue. Examples might include a gay bar, an African American Baptist church, a Chinese New Year celebration, a primarily white suburban shopping complex, the Islamic Center, a non-profit organization that serves a population new to you, a political group you disagree with or a self-help group such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Choose an environment in which you'll be able to talk to people and in which they will be likely to want to share about their culture with you. Take this seriously and cross a real boundary for **you**. Be thoughtful and safe about your choice and have it approved by the instructor.

Enter this environment in a spirit of openness. While in this new environment, please engage in a minimum of three conversations with people in that environment. The goal with these conversations is to go beyond basic scripts such as "How are you? Fine. It's cold out. Yeah." or "What would you like to order? I'll have the burger." Ask open-ended questions that generate meaningful responses and conversations from those around you. Practice listening skills. Do not lie about the reason you are in this environment (for example, pretending to want to join their religion) – tell people that you are there to learn and grow.

You may complete this assignment in pairs with another person. Be aware of how the person you conduct the assignment with may be impacting your experience and reflect on that (for example, did their presence hinder or help your ability to converse? ; how did their ethnic background impact the way you were perceived? ; what insights did they share with you that surprised you?).

After completing the assignment, reflect on your experience:

- **BRIEFLY** describe the environment you visited and the cultural boundary you crossed. What did you feel like while in the new environment? What was most challenging? What was easy?
- Note any stereotypes you hold about the place/group that you visited. Were they challenged or confirmed by your experience?
- Connect your experience to a concept we've discussed in class or course readings. Cite appropriately.

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- Note how this experience has impacted your ability to traverse a new culture. How will your learning from this experience translate on your global service-learning course? How might you experience diversity among the group or in the culture you are visiting? What goals do you have for yourself in terms of boundary crossing while on this journey?

Example Boundary Crossing Choices

Note that you may choose to restrict the list to ethnic and cultural groups. This is an expanded list depending on the goals of your course content, the level of diversity your participants are familiar with and the options in your community.

Choice	Examples	Facilitative Notes
Religious Services & Groups	Church, Mosque, Synagogue, Temple, Atheist Club, Pagan Celebration	These are often friendly to outsiders and have regular meetings so are easy to schedule.
Restaurants/Bars	Gay Bar, Drag Show, Ethiopian Restaurant, Fast Food, Soul Food, Indian Food	These are easy to access yet having meaningful conversations in these environments can be difficult. Good choice for student who is very concerned about food in the community you will be visiting.
Events	Chinese New Year, Turkish Festival, Gay Pride Parade, Hindu dance performance, African drumming concert, Political Rallies/Protests	These provide unique experiences but may be hard to find depending on the community your participants live in.
Non-Profit Organizations	Services for people with disabilities or at-risk youth, Elderly, Military	Often the best way to connect to these organizations is to offer to volunteer
Self-Help Groups	Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Over-Eater Anonymous	Must check with the group to determine if it's open to the public. Also, participants need to be clear that they are there to learn (don't pretend to be a part of the group).
Neighborhoods/Communities	Latino neighborhood, White suburban neighborhood, African-American neighborhood	Wandering around a neighborhood is not a good choice but finding a destination event, restaurant or organization to visit and exploring the community along the way, can work well.