

# Culture, Social Problems, and Social Change: A study in Lisbon

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**"Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both." C. Wright Mills (The Sociological Imagination. 1959)**

## Description

Social problems, change, and culture exist in all societies. Our American society is just one of many. This course is designed to spark your sociological imagination (C. Wright Mills). This is where we see the world both as an individual living a unique life, but also see the larger social dynamics that shape our experiences, opportunities, and social realities. This study abroad course will offer the chance to be an “outsider” as we examine how another nation and culture responds to challenges and social problems in unique ways. The course will be divided into two sections and Lisbon will serve as our city laboratory where we will explore and study: (section 1) Culture, history, colonialism, immigration, and race (section 2) Portugal’s decriminalization of drug consumption and its impacts on both the public health and justice levels.

## Course Objective

This course strives to spark the sociological imagination and the ability to think critically about society. Through the sociological imagination we hope to gain insight into why people do what they do. This will be aided by developing the ability to ask meaningful questions and seek answers. Upon leaving this course and experience, the goal is that you will have a wider view of the world which will help you see your own a little clearer, and be able to critically address the problems, and assess the possible solutions with your newly developed view.

## Course Requirements

*Attendance and Participation:* You are required to attend each class, session, site visit, and to participate in our unique opportunities.

*Tolerance, Sensitivity, and Respect:* In this course, we will discuss sensitive topics that touch upon our values and some of the ideas that are central to our identity. We will not always be in agreement about these ideas, but we will always respect and do our best to learn. We will be considerate of differences in race, class, gender, ability, and sexuality, and reserve judgment. We will treat each other with respect, and help everyone to feel comfortable sharing in our learning environment.

*Question log/journal:* Developing questions, seeking answers, and discussion will form the major academic portion of the course. You will be asked to reflect on the events of the day and to develop questions. This questioning is at the heart of sociology. Developing meaningful questions will allow you to reflect upon and connect presentations from experts, activists, and community leaders to the site visits and discuss these with the group. These questions may serve as a basis for our, and your exploration of the city, our discussion sessions, and site visits. are encouraged to chase your own curiosity as we explore cultural and social issues.

I ask that you take your time to think about what you want to ask. By developing and asking meaningful questions, it offers an opportunity for you to play an active role in your learning. It allows you to express creativity and spark conversation. Asking good questions can lead to self-discovery, considering alternatives, and encourage intellectual growth. There may be times when I pose a question to you to reflect on.

*Final Paper:* For your final paper I would like you to read back over your journal entries, questions, and answers. I would like you to answer the following questions: what was the most valuable answer or lesson learned on this trip? What was the most surprising thing you learned? Did you have any questions that went unanswered? How do you think you will be able to use your newly formed sociological imagination back home and in college? This should be 3-5 pages and will be due at the end of the course.

We may not be able to find answers to all of the questions asked, and we may discover the amount of time in Lisbon is not enough as our curiosity develops and leads to more questions. That is the spark of the sociological imagination that I hope you keep.

**Grading: Students will be evaluated based on the following grading scheme (details below):**

**40% Attendance and Participation- includes having questions prepared for the day.**

**30% Trip Journal and Questions**

**30% Final Paper**

**Trip Journal: journal relating to experiences in Lisbon, this will include your questions, and lessons learned for the day. For your journal write a well-developed paragraph for most entries, not just a phrase. I am mostly concerned with the effort and thought that goes into reflecting on experiences, questions, and your attempt to find answers rather than grammar, length, and paragraph development.**

## **Proposed Itinerary and Thematic Areas**

Visiting Lisbon will allow you to explore some key areas of culture, social problems, and social change by learning from academicians, experts, activists, and conducting site visits in the following thematic areas:

### *History and Cultural*

Language- an Introduction to Portuguese

Field visits to museums, historic sites, and cultural centers

### *Race and ethnicity in Lisbon*

Exploring immigration issues- visits to racial and ethnic cultural centers such as Centro Cultural Cabo Verde, grassroots organizations, and activists.

### *Drugs as a social problem, the Response in Portugal*

Expert sessions and instruction along with Visits to grassroots organizations such as In Mouria, and Crescer.