Tips for Developing a Winter Term Research/Writing Project Abroad

When developing a topic, remember:

- Have a well thought-out research question or clear working hypothesis.
- Add to the discourse. Look at an issue that hasn’t been explored previously or examine a new aspect of a subject.
- Be sure you have sufficient background and familiarity to examine the issue in a sophisticated manner.
- Avoid choosing a topic that is too broad or complicated – Winter Term is quite short.

Meet with one of the HLS research librarians:

- They are trained in law as well as library science.
- Librarians can assist with a pre-emption check, help determine what sources can be found in/through the HLS library and what information has to be obtained abroad, and aid you in developing a preliminary bibliography.

Be sure your research warrants international travel – for example:

- Obtaining archival materials from a foreign library or institution
- Reviewing case law that isn’t available outside of another country
- Conducting in-person interviews
- Observing court or other proceedings, or phenomena such as elections or responses to political issues

Identify and approach an appropriate faculty advisor:

- Seek out a faculty advisor whose area(s) of expertise and interest align with your proposed research focus. It's not necessary to know the professor already – most are very approachable.
- When arranging a meeting, send a description of what you propose (at least a paragraph) that demonstrates that you have done some preliminary work.
- Be prepared to ask specific questions about what you are contemplating.
- Contact the professor early to ensure time to incorporate their feedback and refine your proposal.

Don't overlook practical considerations:

- Will your research require foreign language proficiency?
- Could the calendar of the foreign country limit your ability to conduct research in January (e.g., institutions closed, people on holiday)?
- Are there sensitivities related to your topic?
- Did you develop a solid and realistic work plan – well before January – for the weeks you will be away and arrange interviews or confirm access to libraries and other resources abroad as needed? Winter Term abroad should be used for research – writing can be done in the spring term after you return to HLS.
- Does your research involve human subjects? Consult with the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects early in the fall semester to ensure you are in compliance with Harvard’s rules.