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UNH Global

Study Abroad's Diversity Challenge

Jim Parsons, COLA Study Abroad Coordinator

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

In 2016 UNH joined the Institute for International Education's Generation Study Abroad campaign, a nationwide effort to double and diversify the number of U.S. college students studying abroad by 2020. The "diversify" objective is significant as it speaks to a major issue long well-known in international education: study abroad participation does not reflect the demographic diversity of the U.S. undergraduate student body. While diversity, identity, and access in higher education have generated high-profile discussions in recent years, within the context of study abroad these issues present their own unique set of dynamics that institutions, including UNH, have increasingly tried to understand and prioritize.



The recognized need to expand access to international educational experiences comes at a time when the positive impact of study abroad on students' academic, personal, and professional developmental goals is increasingly well documented. Comprehensive institutional studies have drawn clear connections between improved academic performance and study abroad, while at the

same time numerous reports have demonstrated the growing degree of value today's economy places on intercultural competencies.¹ Despite this, only about 10% of U.S. undergraduate students participate in a study abroad program prior to graduation.² Furthermore, demographic information highlights the fact study abroad participation nationally is not reflective of the larger U.S. student population. For example, though the participation rates for minority students has increased over the past ten years, 73% of students who studied abroad in 2014-15 were white. In addition, participation rates of female students has consistently and disproportionately outweighed male participation, making up nearly 70% of the study abroad population consistently over the past ten years.³ Beyond these more "familiar" categories of race/ethnicity and gender, there remain other identifiable groups for whom study abroad is more likely to be (or perceived to be) an out-of-reach opportunity. This includes, for example, students whose fields of study present demanding, campus-bound curricula (most commonly in the STEM fields); student athletes who cannot take time off from practice and competition obligations; and low-income and first-generation college students who may more likely lack financial resources, family support, or a familiarity with study abroad and international travel.



There are many notable examples, both national and campus-specific, of efforts to counteract these trends. This includes increased funding opportunities targeted at students in need, such as the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship (<http://www.unh.edu/fellowships-office/benjamin-gilman-international-scholarship>) sponsored by the U.S. Department of State which supports students with high financial need and from historically underrepresented backgrounds (see related article (<https://www.unh.edu/global/gilman-scholarships-broaden-cultural-and-academic-horizons>)). But beyond increased funding, which remains critical and a primary obstacle for students, there is also the more nuanced problem of better understanding the barriers

that prevent certain students from studying abroad (or many times even considering it), and

developing successful responsive strategies. One recent example that gained headlines was SUNY Oswego's "I, Too, Am Study Abroad" campaign (<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/05/09/suny-oswego-sees-success-diversifying-its-study-abroad-population>), a series of panels which highlighted experiences of students from diverse backgrounds who had studied abroad talking about subjects like racial and gender identity, and finances. This type of thoughtful approach may involve a substantial amount of work, extensive relationship building across campus, false starts, and long-term yield on results, but the goal is to create a sustainable and comprehensive approach to diversifying study abroad that responds to the specific needs of an institution and its students.

While overall UNH study abroad participation rates (ranging from 20-25%) are well above the national average, the Generation Study Abroad pledge brings an emphasis on not only increasing but also diversifying study abroad at UNH. Over the past year, the Center for International Education and Global Engagement (CIEGE) has undertaken several efforts towards the goal of diversifying study abroad participation at UNH. One of the most significant developments was the launch of the CIEGE Diversity Scholarship (</global/ciege-study-abroad-scholarships>) (made possible by a new fund jump started by a gift from alum Andrea Voytko, '80, deputy director at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation), which seeks to award multiple \$2500 scholarships to students underrepresented within the study abroad context at UNH. This comprises the following categories: major (STEM students), ethnicity, race, first-generation, age, abilities, LGBTQ, veteran status, male gender, and athletes. In addition to new, targeted funding opportunities, CIEGE has also worked on broader efforts to establish an effective message to a diverse array of UNH students who may be likely to face real or perceived barriers to study abroad. CIEGE Administrative Director for Education Abroad Beth Kilinc describes the approach as using the diversity goals as a "prism" that informs all aspects of study abroad activities on campus. This approach has largely taken the form of long-term and collaborative relationship building with important stakeholders on campus. For example, CIEGE has worked closely with the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, TRIO, the Connect Program, and the McNair Program to partner on outreach efforts tailored to respond to the needs of students affiliated with those organizations. This has taken the form of specific marketing materials, special info sessions or student meetings, or simply finding opportunities to more regularly engage with students through an organization's regular programming. In addition to student outreach efforts, CIEGE also prioritizes working more closely with faculty to help foster and expand faculty-developed study abroad programming, opportunities that UNH students are most likely to pursue. However,

alongside these essential, more internal institutional efforts, Kilinc stresses that increased financial support to students remains the most impactful action to achieve significant progress towards the goals of diversifying and expanding access to international opportunities for UNH students.

¹ A list of institutional studies on study abroad impact can be found here:

<http://globaledresearch.com/study-abroad-impact.asp> (<http://globaledresearch.com/study-abroad-impact.asp>). On the economic advantages of study abroad, see for example:

<http://aimoverseas.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/UAAsiaBoundOutcomesResearch-Final.pdf>,

<http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Publications-and-Reports/IIE-Bookstore/Value-of-International-Education#.WluVglUrK00>

(<http://aimoverseas.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/UAAsiaBoundOutcomesResearch-Final.pdf>,

<http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Publications-and-Reports/IIE-Bookstore/Value-of-International-Education#.WluVglUrK00>),

and <http://www.eaie.org/blog/students-global-workforce/>

(<http://www.eaie.org/blog/students-global-workforce/>)

²<http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad#.WldNtcMrLnA>

(<http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad#.WldNtcMrLnA>)

³<http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Student-Profile/2004-15>

(<http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Student-Profile/2004-15>)

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