



diversityabroad

# THE GLOBAL IMPACT EXCHANGE

A Quarterly Publication of Diversity Abroad

SPRING 2018 EDITION

**INTERSECTIONALITY, IDENTITY,  
& GLOBAL EDUCATION:  
EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITIES**



[diversityabroad.org](http://diversityabroad.org) | [members@diversitynetwork.org](mailto:members@diversitynetwork.org) | 510-982-0635 ext. 704

7<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL

# DIVERSITY ABROAD CONFERENCE

Call for  
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*Equity and Opportunity Through Inclusive Global Education*

March 2-5, 2019 | Boston, MA | Host: Emerson College



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## **4** Publication Information

### Articles

---

- 6** Responsible Critical Identity Work for Interrupting Systems in Global Education
  - 8** Staying Woke, Abroad: When They Bring Their Whole Selves Abroad in Socially-Turbulent Times, We Must Be Ready to Embrace Their Complexities
  - 10** A Glimpse at LGBTQ+ Services at Non-U.S. Universities
  - 13** Expanding Our Reach: Opportunities for Global Educators of Color in the Internationalization of Higher Education in Asia
  - 15** Embracing Differences: Seeing Myself Through the Eyes of my Students
  - 17** Colliding and Diverging Identities and Struggles: Recognizing Privilege and Positionality Abroad
  - 21** Diversity Matters: Impacts of a Diverse Study Abroad Cohort on Intercultural Development
  - 26** The Commonalities that make us different: African American identity in Cameroon and Ghana
- 

## **29** Editorial Advisory Board

# PUBLICATION INFORMATION



## The Global Impact Exchange

*A Quarterly Publication  
of Diversity Abroad*

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The Global Impact Exchange quarterly publication serves to advance domestic and international conversations around diversity, inclusion, and equity in global education with respect to the thematic focus identified each quarter.

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## Acknowledgments

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A special thank-you to members of the Diversity Abroad Network consortium for supporting thought leadership at the intersection of global education and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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**Intersectionality, Identity,  
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Exploring the Complexities**

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How might one's social identities influence their global education experience and cross-cultural journey abroad? In what ways does the intersections of one's social, personal, and professional identities interact with the local contexts and communities in which they engage? For professionals, how do their identities impact the ways they interact with students, across the spectrum of support provided? How do organizational structure, hiring & retention practices, and work culture reflect a commitment to diverse expressions of identity in our work? What are models and best practices for promoting social justice, human rights, peace, civic engagement, and cultural diversity abroad?

# THE DIVERSITY ABROAD NETWORK



Diversity Abroad's membership consortium, the Diversity Abroad Network, is the leading professional consortium of educational institutions, government agencies, for-profit and non-profit organizations who share Diversity Abroad's vision that the next generation of young people from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and global acumen to thrive in the 21st century interconnected world and global workforce. Thanks Diversity Abroad Network members champion policies and practices that advance diversity and inclusion in global education and connect diverse students to educational and career opportunities.

The Diversity Abroad Network connects its members to the good practice guidelines, professional learning & development opportunities, and advising resources needed to ensure that all students have equitable access to and are adequately prepared for meaningful global education opportunities. Through its member consortium, Diversity Abroad leads the field of global education in advancing diversity and inclusive excellence by:

- Developing Diversity & Inclusive Best Practices
- Championing the Importance of Equity & Inclusion in Global Education
- Facilitating Professional Development & Networking Opportunities
- Fostering Assessment & Research
- Developing Practical Tools for Inclusive Outreach, Advising, & Instruction
- Connecting Diverse Students to Resources that Support Global Learning

## MEMBERSHIP

Diversity Abroad Network members support the mission and goals of Diversity Abroad through collaboration on projects, data collection, sharing resources, participation in task force groups, and membership dues.

Membership also supports the important work that Diversity Abroad engages in to provide institutions and organizations with the good practice guidelines, research, resources, and learning opportunities essential to provide equitable access to global education. Additionally, Diversity Abroad Network members are able to share successful practices, recommendations, and experiences, which allow them to play an important role in shaping Diversity Abroad's activities and advocacy.



# RESPONSIBLE CRITICAL IDENTITY WORK FOR INTERRUPTING SYSTEMS IN GLOBAL EDUCATION

KAREEN COYOCA | Program Coordinator, The Experiment in International Living

**In late March of this year, Linda Brown of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* passed away—once a young girl from Topeka, Kansas who brought forward a pivotal case that ended segregation in public schools in the U.S. This May marks 64 years since *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled against the racial segregation of schools. However, reports show that while classrooms are no longer racially separate, they are not necessarily equal.**

Analyzing the teacher workforce today, the U.S. Department of Education generated a 2016 report entitled *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce* that revealed “decreasing diversity at multiple points across the teacher pipeline through which teachers progress through postsecondary education, teacher preparation programs, hiring, and retention.” Similar reports by the Shanker Institute (2015), the National Center for Education Statistics (2013 and 2013), and the Center for American Progress (2014) agree, showing a large and growing gap between the percentage of students of color, approximately 50%, and the percentage of teachers of color, approximately 18%. Paradoxically, due to the *Brown* decision on integration, tens of thousands of African-American teachers were fired or laid off. In *Black Issues in Higher Education* (now *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*), B.D. Hawkins estimates that 82,000 African-American teachers provided instruction for a black student population numbering around two million in 1954. Within ten years after *Brown*, almost 40,000 African-American teachers and administrators lost their jobs.

Moreover, a 2007 study by the *Journal of Educational Psychology* analyzed over 30 years of research of how teachers interacted with students of varying backgrounds and identities. Researchers found that, overall, teachers’ expectations and actions varied depending on the race of the student. In addition, a 2012 study from the American Sociological Association analyzed a national survey of 15,362 high school sophomores, as well as their parents and teachers, and found a bias among white teachers that favored white students. The civil rights victory achieved to increase educational access and equity for all children had an enduring effect on not just the African-American teaching force but on all students, an impact that is clearly observed in today’s education system.

The need for a more diverse teacher workforce is evident, and amidst these numbers is the experiential disconnect between the identities of approximately 50% of students of color compared to the identities of 80% of white teachers. Alongside efforts to diversify the homogeneous teacher population is a pressing need to address and challenge educator training itself to ultimately meet the multicultural competencies of an

increasingly diversifying society. According to the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE), the high school class of 2025 will be the largest and most ethnically diverse class the U.S. has ever seen. How are we taking responsibility of the teacher workforce to meet the needs of future populations?

Global education and its workforce are direct products of and representative of this very education system. According to the Institute of International Education's 2017 Open Doors Report on study abroad, 71.6% of students studying abroad in 2015-2016 were white, compared to 9.7% Hispanic or Latinx, 8.4% Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 5.9% percent Black or African-American, and 0.5% American Indian or Alaska Native. Yet institutions such as NAFSA, IIE, and higher education do not mirror this diversity staff and professionals. Global education must address this disconnect and critique the systems that have produced inequities in both student and practitioner populations. Part of this requires considering experiential learning. While cultural immersion and learning by doing are components that global education has touted as strengths in its pedagogy, it is an area that is lacking for minority students in terms of their lived experiences. So, if underrepresented populations do not see themselves mirrored in global education professionals' experiences and identities, how can they expect to feel supported or understood? Furthermore, how do overrepresented populations diversify their worldviews and lenses if global education institutions remain homogeneous?

Traditional, classroom-based education is restructuring to take into account student backgrounds and multiculturalism, yet without an experiential component on behalf of educators there is a danger of intellectualizing what has been learned solely through banking methods. By merely intellectualizing diversity there is a

lack of integration of, and relationship to, what another is experiencing into our awareness and understanding. This lack of integration and awareness can be a barrier between global education practitioners and students such that the practitioner does not really 'get it' with regards to what the student may encounter or need while on a study abroad program. Global education must interrogate its practices and evaluate its workforce to reflect that of the student diversity it is continually pursuing.

To conclude, yes, there must be more energy spent on recruiting and retaining diverse global education practitioners, yet the current workforce must also receive training that pushes them to reflect on the impact of their identity and experiences, or lack thereof. As noted above, the percentage of white teachers is much higher in comparison to the diversity of students. To not only remain committed to experiential pedagogy, but also thoughtful with student interaction, the following must be priorities for the field of global education: on-going reflective practice, the interrogation of historical and current systems, and the utilization of identity in understanding equity. At the core of providing quality education is a global education professional capable of meeting the needs of individual students in conjunction with questioning and interrupting archaic systems and linear thinking. As professionals, what identities do we have that we are not considering, such as privileged identities, that may influence our approaches? How are we examining our beliefs about our pedagogies and exploring the effectiveness of our practices in accommodating and integrating the various cultures and backgrounds of students? For the field of global education as a whole, how are we arming the current workforce with the tools to interrogate their identities? How do our current practices reflect our strategies for future diversity and equity, or do they at all?

# STAYING WOKE, ABROAD: WHEN THEY BRING THEIR WHOLE SELVES ABROAD IN SOCIALLY-TURBULENT TIMES, WE MUST BE READY TO EMBRACE THEIR COMPLEXITIES

**GRETCHEN COOK-ANDERSON** | Director of Diversity Recruiting & Advising, IES Abroad

**Driven by Black Lives Matter, turbulent political threats to immigration and race relations, and the growing voices of the #MeToo movement, many U.S. undergraduates are, more than ever, exploring inextricably linked aspects of their own identities in relation to their perceived place and potential in modern U.S. society.**

As the world turns, so to speak, our U.S. students are venturing beyond our borders into often uncharted cultural territory *woke*, or with heightened or budding awareness of how the intersections of their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomics, country of origin, and other identities influence how the world engages with them.

With this comes an increasingly pressing responsibility for education abroad professionals to be ready to both embrace our students' multifaceted identities, increasingly socially-aware selves, and expectations of the world's inclusiveness, and balance this with squaring students' expectations with cultural realities in their host countries.

It's us too who must stay 'woke, abroad' to comprehend and be responsive to patterns of individual social angst and, at times, the collective mood of our students, some of whom are deeply affected, juggling the socio-emotional effects of identity-based social discord at home and an unfamiliar new culture that may view them through a different lens.

Smith College alumna, Regina Wu, underscored the impact of intersectionality in her blog posts while abroad in Tokyo, explaining that, "as a Chinese-American, I contemplated how I grew up in an individualistic American society in contrast to my home, where my Chinese immigrant parents raised me to value the collective whole. And, as a low-income, first-generation college student, I reflected on how blessed I felt to be able to not only be the first person in my family to go to college, but also be the first to study abroad."

But, "as a Smithie outside of the Smith bubble, I learned how to engage in dialogue with people who didn't have the same radical, liberal views as me," Wu said.

During my own first time abroad as an African American junior in the late 1980s, there was no forethought in the field on helping students navigate complex questions of personal identity relative to host culture or intercultural cohort relationships. In hindsight, I believe unequivocally the oversight was glaring, though typical of that era, and a lost opportunity for another rich layer of learning and self-discovery. We have a real opportunity to do better for this student generation.



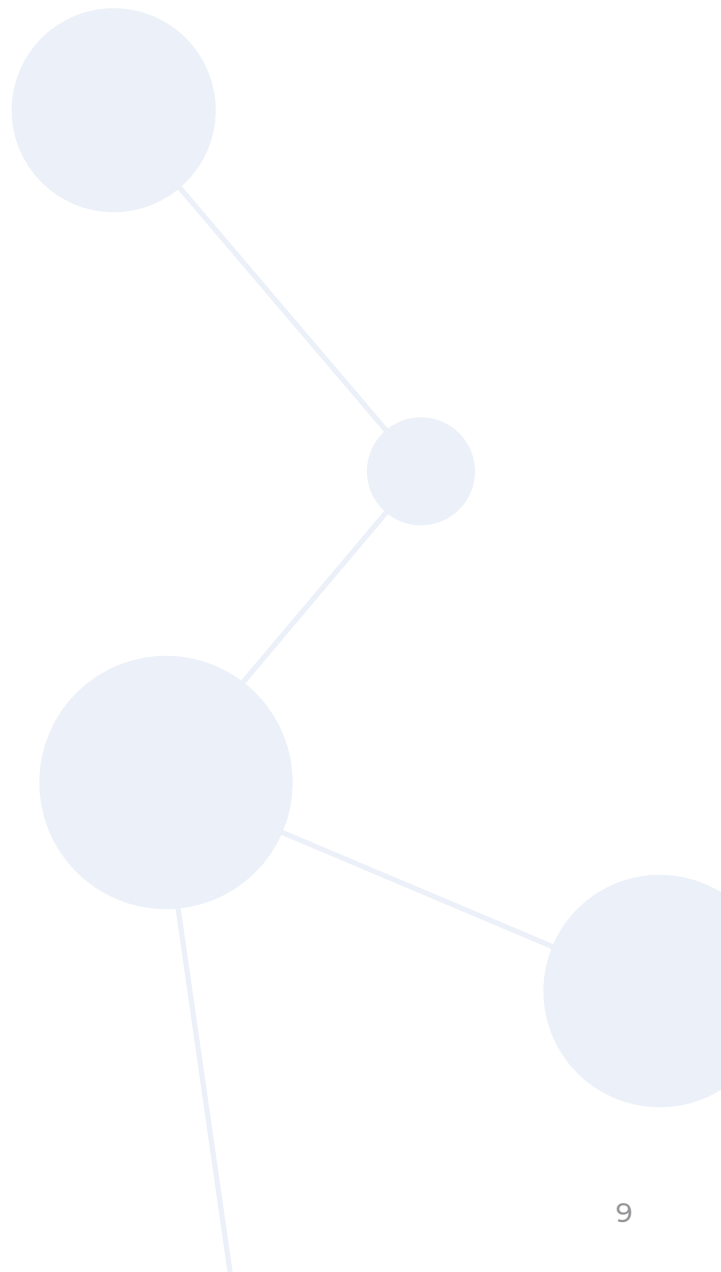
Regina's unpacking of lessons related to her own identities against the backdrop of her host culture is a contemporary aspect of some study abroad programming that is, I'd contend, both necessary due to the knotty social landscape in the U.S., in particular, and beneficial as an academic exercise for all students.

The U.S. is not the center of the universe, nor is our students' awakened sense of self. However, there's value in using this time in our history as an opportunity to enrich the students' study abroad experience as professionals through program design that consciously considers intersectionality and its value to intercultural learning.

David Howell, a Ferrum College dean and coordinator of faculty-led programs abroad for nearly 30 years, quoted Nobel economist Amartya Sen in debating the merits of intersectionality-centered study abroad program design. He suggests there's danger in "a 'solitarist' approach to human identity" that functions from the "odd presumption that the people of the world can be uniquely categorized according to some singular and overarching system of partitioning." In Howell's view, with traditional program design, "various dimensions of a person's identity lie unexamined, but the experience of being in a different cultural location in a study abroad experience brings to the forefront and questions identities that are assumed and experiences which are perceived to be normative and universal."

Some students, woke though they may be, wrestle with expectations for a study abroad experience that will provide a much-needed retreat from U.S. campuses fraught with the impacts of intercultural restlessness, only to find that their host culture's perceptions of some aspect of who they are do not afford such a luxury.

So, beyond the benefits to classroom learning, when professionals in our field are woke – truly focused on the intersectionality of our students, and improving our understanding of the U.S. history that shapes the lenses through which they see the world – we're poised to better deliver significant intercultural and social-emotional support, and lessons for our students to learn in the midst of new cultural experiences abroad. Not doing so can be detrimental to our students and, in time, to program regard and enrollment, as matters of intersectionality abroad take on increasing importance for a new generation.



# A GLIMPSE AT LGBTQ+ SERVICES AT NON-U.S. UNIVERSITIES

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**AARON FAUCHER** | Assistant Director of Custom Programs & Inclusive Outreach, CISabroad

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**JOSHUA MOON  
JOHNSON, PHD** | Dean of Student Services,  
Equity Programs and Pathways | American River College

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**VIVIE NGUYEN** | Director for Intercultural Engagement, University of Puget Sound

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**U.S.-style higher education and student affairs as a profession are expanding to many parts of the world. However, institutions abroad may have limited knowledge and services to address the needs of LGBTQ+ students. As U.S. students begin studying abroad in less traditional locations (i.e., non-European) in greater frequency, advisors and administrators should be aware of the LGBTQ+ climate and resources available.**

The present research was conducted by three professionals with a combination of experience in U.S. student affairs and international education. The project surveyed individuals informed of LGBTQ+ student experiences on non-U.S. university campuses and the local resources available to them. An interview questionnaire examining the themes of social, cultural, religious, and legal climate related to sexual orientation and gender identity in the institution's region and country; institutional policies, services, and resources related to sexual orientation and gender identity on and off campus; LGBTQ+ dating and intimate encounter options and opportunities; and local bias, harassment, and identity-based discrimination was sent to 135 individuals. Twenty-eight institutions responded, representing 19 countries.

## Ongoing Harassment and Discrimination

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Certain broad themes emerged from our respondents. Unsurprisingly, even at institutions with many resources that operate in societies that are quite welcoming to LGBTQ+ folks, assaults, mistreatment, and discrimination still occur. Students and staff the world over experience issues ranging from microaggressions to prison time or the death penalty. Climate and student services vary drastically by region, by nation, and by locality; every country and every institution has progress to make. Overall, metropolitan institutions had more services available than those in remote areas.

Researchers generally assess LGBTQ climate at the national level. From there, trends emerge along regional lines. Parts of Europe, the Americas, and the Asia/Pacific arena are seeing notable improvements. Less progress has been reported in the Middle East and most of Africa. Our findings

are presented in the following short regional summaries. The authors note and acknowledge the variance within continents, regions, and countries. Other identity factors such as race, gender, and class can have additional impacts on LGBTQ experiences.

## Europe

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Overall, our LGBTQ students were described as having positive experiences on campus at responders' institutions throughout Europe. Findings indicated that liberal, centralized cities and countries in Northern and Western Europe tend to be the most welcoming of LGBTQ people, trending less welcoming to the south and east, in general.

Students in Europe can often find student-based organizations and support groups, supportive institutional policies, campus resources, and off-campus options for social life. Issues most commonly reported were microaggressions and heightened difficulties for individuals with intersecting identities or perceived non-cisgender identity/expression.

## Americas

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LGBTQ students in the Americas also reported generally having positive experiences. Climate and legal protections varied more in this region than in Europe, yet a similar influence of religious beliefs over societal and political opinions on LGBTQ matters is also found here. Despite this, gender identity and same-sex marriage are openly discussed and legal protections are becoming increasingly common. Resources on campus included gender-inclusive restrooms and accommodations and LGBTQ student organizations. LGBTQ people on campus are protected by general anti-discrimination policies.

## Asia / Pacific

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Asia and the greater Pacific region, being the largest area by land and population, demonstrated a highly varied LGBTQ climate. Throughout most of the region, LGBTQ folks mostly face socio-cultural issues rather than threats to their safety. Though same-sex activity is decriminalized throughout most of the region, few countries offer legal protection for LGBTQ people or allow same-sex marriage. There are still some areas where LGBTQ folks could face legal persecution.

Numerous campuses and community resources were reported, including trained staff serving as counselors and center coordinators, inclusive anti-bullying policies, gender-inclusive housing, coursework in gender and sexuality, and the existence of LGBTQ student clubs. Respondents in China, Japan, Singapore, and some Pacific Islands pointed to community resources, including Pride programming on and off-campus.

## Africa / Middle East

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Overall, responses to our study suggested that the Africa / Middle East region would be the least welcoming for LGBTQ people with a higher likelihood of violent assaults and a climate reported as less tolerant overall. Legal protections for LGBTQ folks are typically few to none. Same-sex activity is criminalized in a significant part of the region and potential legal action could be as severe as the death penalty.

In some places, the climate is actually becoming more violent for LGBTQ folks. Throughout most of the region, training on tolerance and allyship is unheard of and institutional employees feel at risk of being fired for supporting LGBTQ students. Students are left to look for online resources,

underground social spaces, and confidential counselors for support. LGBTQ folks in the region report feelings of internalized homophobia, shame, bias, suicidal ideation, and potential exile from community.

A few bright spots were shared by participants. For example, a participant in South Africa highlighted LGBTQ provisions in local anti-discrimination laws, community groups and NGOs, and gender-inclusive facilities, resource centers, and dedicated staff on campus.

## Limitations

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This study was not designed as a comprehensive project on global LGBTQ rights. Instead, it is a qualitative snapshot compiling the personal observations of staff and administrators at universities around the world.

## Strategies

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### Regional research

Perhaps the most impactful practice for advisors working with LGBTQ+ students prior to departure is to help with their research. Online resources from the ILGA, NAFSA's Rainbow SIG, or Diversity Abroad allow students to peruse information they feel is pertinent to their identity.

It is important to ensure that our gauge for LGBTQ-friendliness considers factors beyond local law. Even in places where same-sex marriage is legal or gender identity policies are progressive, the society could still be less tolerant of LGBTQ folks than what the student experiences at home. By contrast, in a place where laws on the books haven't caught up to the most progressive examples around the world, the society may have long been tolerant or celebratory of LGBTQ people. In

countries where LGBTQ activity and identities are illegal, analyze the risk to the student and what precautions need to be taken.

### Expression of identity

Engage in conversation about how comfortable the student may be with a different level of 'outness' while abroad. Acknowledge that they may have never been 'in the closet' but may need to mask parts of their identity for personal safety. Encourage open-mindedness, such as having students consider cultural taboos before assuming a question or critique is intended to be anti-LGBTQ.

### Assess campus and community resources

Familiarize yourself and guide students to look for campus and community resources in their destination. Check for community Pride celebrations, LGBTQ+ student centers or support groups, gender/sexuality studies curriculum, gender-inclusive restrooms, integrated housing, and/or counseling services.

### Inquire with partners

If your institution partners with international education organizations or third-party providers, check with program coordinators on their campus and country expertise. Do they have staff on site? Is staff sensitive to the needs of LGBTQ+ students?

### Maintain support systems

Encourage students to maintain or strengthen their support system before going abroad. Keeping up with family, friends, program returnees, and advisors prior to departure will help ease anxieties and increase preparedness as well as potentially avoid feelings of isolation once abroad.

# EXPANDING OUR REACH: OPPORTUNITIES FOR GLOBAL EDUCATORS OF COLOR IN THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASIA

SAVON JACKSON

Study Abroad Advisor, The George Washington University

**Asia has become one of the most dynamic regions for the internationalization of higher education, with nine universities in the top 100 [World University Rankings](#) in 2018. This trend drives demand for native English speakers in Asian universities, generating opportunities for American staff and faculty. However, of this cohort, professionals of color are starkly few and far between. Racial inclusion does not stop at the U.S. border; it is imperative that stories and ideas of faculty and staff of color are a part of the American narrative abroad.**

As a black male professional who has worked, lived, and traveled throughout Asia, very seldom have I seen faces that look like mine. While data is not readily available at the faculty and staff level, the disparity is just as clear at the student level. In the 2017 [Institute for International Education Open Doors](#) report, which tracks undergraduate study abroad mobility, Black, Latinx, Asian, multiracial and Native American students altogether make up only 28.4% of study abroad students, compared to 71.6% of their white peers. While these numbers are disheartening, increasing the presence of staff and faculty of color in Asian universities could open doors for more students.

Although domestically there has been more attention to the stories of underrepresented groups, internationally our stories are still not being told. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity travel to Tokyo for a week to participate in the [Kakehashi Project](#), a fully-funded research tour financed by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After visiting Waseda University and Sophia University, two of Japan's top institutions, I

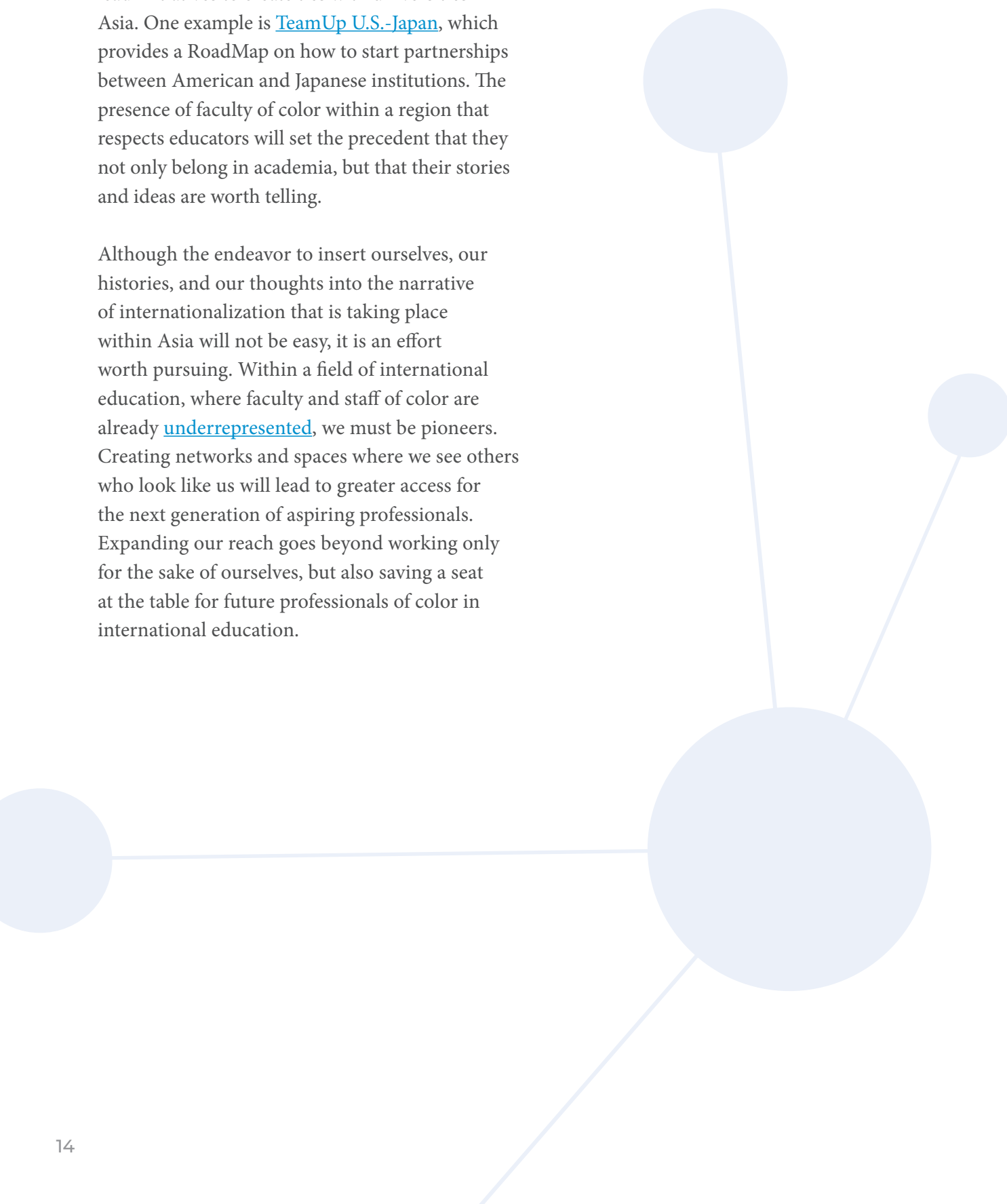
realized that the demand for international faculty and staff in Japan must include professionals of color. While the golden standard for a typical American may be white and blonde, a crucial part of changing this narrative to include our stories is being present in the room to tell them ourselves.

So how do professionals of color go about telling our stories? One of the ways we can integrate ourselves into this arena is to start with short-term experiences to learn about higher education institutions in Asia. Having short-term exposure is a first step toward understanding the complexities within Asia, as well as a chance to establish networks in the region.

For upper administration within study abroad offices, programs like the [Fulbright International Education Administrators Seminar](#) offer a highly reputable opportunity to connect within colleagues in the field domestically and university faculty and staff abroad. At the advisor level, taking advantage of opportunities to attend program-provider familiarization trips, visit exchange university

partners, and assist your university professors on short-term programs abroad to Asia present additional options. At the faculty level, there are also opportunities for professors of color to lead initiatives to create ties with universities in Asia. One example is [TeamUp U.S.-Japan](#), which provides a RoadMap on how to start partnerships between American and Japanese institutions. The presence of faculty of color within a region that respects educators will set the precedent that they not only belong in academia, but that their stories and ideas are worth telling.

Although the endeavor to insert ourselves, our histories, and our thoughts into the narrative of internationalization that is taking place within Asia will not be easy, it is an effort worth pursuing. Within a field of international education, where faculty and staff of color are already [underrepresented](#), we must be pioneers. Creating networks and spaces where we see others who look like us will lead to greater access for the next generation of aspiring professionals. Expanding our reach goes beyond working only for the sake of ourselves, but also saving a seat at the table for future professionals of color in international education.



# EMBRACING DIFFERENCES: SEEING MYSELF THROUGH THE EYES OF MY STUDENTS

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**SARAH MANCHANDA**

AIF Clinton Fellow 2015-16, American India Foundation  
Doctoral Student in Education, UC Berkeley

**One of my fifth-grade students seldom remained in class for a full period. His defiance was understandable. As an African American male diagnosed with an emotional and behavioral disturbance (EBD), he was perceived as ‘unteachable’.**

**His disability made him prone to impulsivity and anger. By the end of his fifth-grade year, he believed that school was a space where only those who understood and conformed to the behavioral norms of sitting upright, listening without questioning, and polite nods were admitted. He felt that he did not belong. His case saddened me—not only because I cared deeply about inspiring all of my students, but because I knew that his case was not isolated.**

When I was in school, I also felt misunderstood by my teachers and peers. Halfway through my fifth-grade year I suddenly and unexpectedly lost a significant portion of my vision. I went from perfect vision to status as legally blind overnight. As a 10-year old, I struggled to integrate this new diagnosis into my self-concept. Through years of trial and error, I found success in school through concealing my disability. Actions that made me appear similar to my able-bodied peers and silenced my frustrations helped me achieve success in a system that was not designed to acknowledge or support my differences. I employed similar strategies in educating students. In my three years as a Special Education teacher I became comfortable with associating disability with deficit, with focusing on curing or eliminating students of their disabilities through targeted interventions, and overall with working within a system that put the onus on students to integrate and succeed through minimization of disability associated differences.

It was not until I began work as an American India Foundation (AIF) Clinton fellow that I began to question the system of Special Education, one I had experienced both as a student and as an educator. As an AIF Clinton fellow, I worked for an NGO based in Andhra Pradesh, India that developed a student-centered pedagogical approach. In my classroom observations, I watched fifth-grade students playfully act out a story to help their younger classmates tackle addition, survey their villages to collect data on malnutrition, and perform shadow puppetry for wide audiences. I saw how a student-centered model could serve to benefit those who have been historically marginalized in traditional educational approaches. Particularly, I was struck by how students connected with their peers regardless of differences based on gender, caste, or disability within this model.

My main role as an AIF Clinton fellow was to create a rigorous mathematics curriculum for students in grades 1-3 that would support the learning needs of all, particularly students with mild to moderate disabilities. As part of this project, I developed assessment tools and monitored the progress of 350 primary-aged students' comprehension in mathematics. I began to introduce checklists and evaluation methods for identifying students at risk of falling behind grade level. I also conducted professional development sessions with teachers and administrators on how students in the United States are identified and referred for Special Education services, with a goal of developing a similar system that would work in their context.

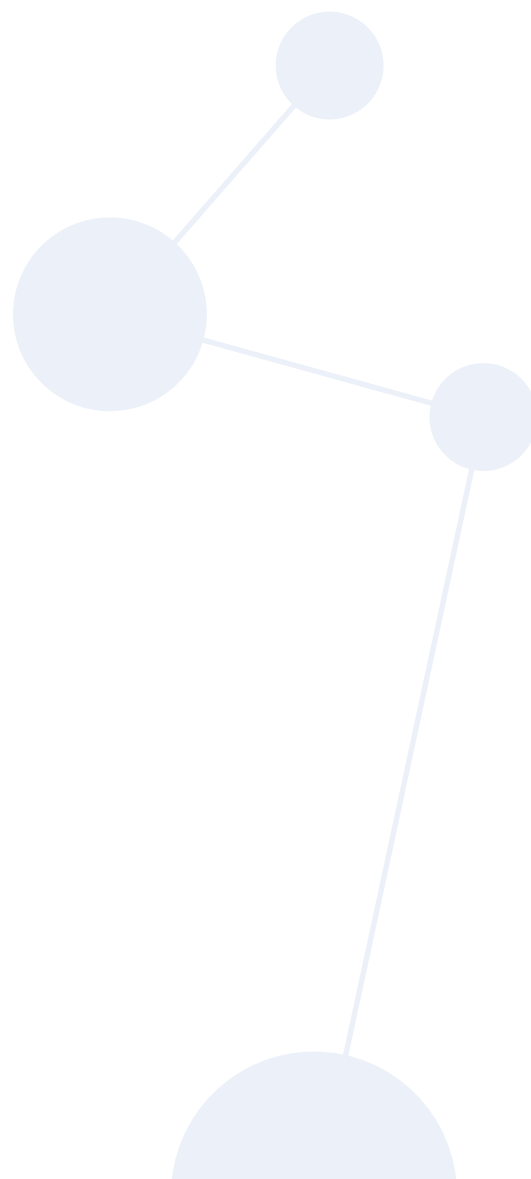
Through dialogue with teachers and administrators, it became apparent that before introducing a system for identifying and classifying students into disability categories, it was necessary to help expand their awareness of disability, and in the process my own acceptance of my identity as a person with a disability. I was wary of shifting the inclusive model of education that existed in their schools to one in which students identified with disabilities would be explicitly or implicitly excluded by teachers or peers.

My understanding of disability is now informed by the orientation adopted in disability studies. Disability studies explores the social meanings, symbols, and stigmas attached to disability identity. Disability is not a physical or mental defect but a cultural and minority identity, and this field of study attacks the assumption that an able body and mind determine one's status as a quality human being (Siebers, 2008).

My experiences and those of my students lead me to wonder, how can I help teachers show kids who feel that the traditional schooling model has no place for them that being different is not a deficit but rather can and should be a source of value? How can we better include student voices in the educational process? These questions have motivated my desire to bring awareness to and greater understanding of disability as a source of difference and strength.

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# COLLIDING AND DIVERGING IDENTITIES AND STRUGGLES: RECOGNIZING PRIVILEGE AND POSITIONALITY ABROAD

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**IVETT MARTINEZ** | Bennington College Class of 2019

**JOCELYN SALCEDO** | Bennington College Class of 2018

**LAURA NUSSBAUM-BARBERENA, PHD** | Research Coordinator, Roosevelt University

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**In January 2017, with a threatened displacement of family and friends in the U.S. heavy on our minds, two first-generation Latina college students and a white professor traveled to a Costa Rican border town, where Nicaraguan migrant women worked to contest the country's anti-migrant political climate, as much as to resolve gender-based violence. Engaged in organizing around migrant rights in the U.S., students aimed to learn about their shared struggles through collaboration on a small project to document areas where municipal authorities could improve efforts to meet the local migrant community's needs in the wake of a recent hurricane.<sup>1</sup> By witnessing the endeavors of Nicaraguan migrant *activistas*, we gained clarity on our relational position among the varied and intersecting realities of Latin American women migrants.**

Research and study abroad are typically premised on the introduction of university students to geographically and culturally distant places. Instead of divergence, we experienced convergence, seeing our struggles reflected in the daily lives of the Nicaraguan migrant women. Still, we navigated tensions that positioned our experiences and practices against the local social and cultural contexts. Discussing our experiences led us to reconsider our struggles in a broader framework, that of dismantling co-constituting racial, ethnonational, and gender hierarchies. We interweave our narration of this experience, with analysis of the ways our positions pushed back on the paradigm of familiarity and unfamiliarity in

global education, subverting assumptions of the experiences that constitute global difference.

Living in rural Vermont, where approximately 95% of the population is White, made us hyper-aware of our ethnicity and ways in which our presence as brown bodies affected the way we navigate physical spaces. We grew accustomed to being treated as the “other,” being judged by our skin color and our Mexican heritage. Among our Latinx peers in Vermont, we linked similarities in our everyday experiences to the shared experiences of brown bodies traveling abroad. We anticipated a sense of familiarity upon traveling to a border town and an immigrant women's organization in Costa

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<sup>1</sup> Nussbaum-Barberena 2017. Various communities on the border between Nicaraguan and Costa Rica were devastated by Hurricane Otto in November 2016, when local authorities failed to heed an executive order to evacuate the town ahead of landfall.

Rica, as we spoke the same language, shared their skin color, and had the same experience of being “othered” due to our ethnonational heritage. We were surprised to learn that the social hierarchies of color and class we were subjected to in the United States translated across international borders, even to places where brown bodies were ‘the norm.’ This realization pushed us to reevaluate our privileges as U.S. citizens.

Discrimination toward Nicaraguans settling in Costa Rican border towns dates to the 1800s, when Costa Rica nationalism, asserting whiteness, political stability, and egalitarianism, emerged in juxtaposition Costa Rican characterizations of Nicaraguans as Mestizo<sup>2</sup>, violent, politically unstable, and unequal.<sup>3</sup> A rising rate of Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica in the 1990s<sup>4</sup> coincided with cutbacks to health and education programs driven by privatization measures. Nicaraguans readily became scapegoats for the reduced access to public services.<sup>5</sup> These ideas are rehashed in everyday life as Costa Ricans heed locally inflected notions of the attributes of whiteness—middle-class status, humility, and passivity—to determine

belonging.<sup>6</sup> Perceiving an increased visibility of attributes they associate with Nicaraguan identity—accents and darker skin tones—many conflate Nicaraguan presence with downturn, committing micro-aggressions or outright discrimination towards Nicaraguans.<sup>7</sup> They are singled out among migrant communities as if their simple presence within the borders brought growing instability and violent conflict.<sup>8</sup>

We were carefully ushered into the day-to-day realities of the Nicaraguan women’s lives. Our eagerness to share their inspirational story of overcoming moments of violence led us toward a reality check on the normality of steep gender hierarchies. It was through our unexpected confrontations with women’s experiences of domestic violence that these intersections and divergences became most apparent, and we found ourselves occupying simultaneously liminal spaces of Latinx in the U.S and Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. Ivett’s particular experience, which she provided in a reflection she wrote to co-authors Salcedo and Nussbaum-Barberena, illustrates this:

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<sup>2</sup> Being of mixed Spanish and Indigenous descent (Gould, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> See: Cortes Ramos (2006); Sandoval Garcia (2002); Alverenga Vertulo (2007); Palmer (1999); Edelman (2000).

<sup>4</sup> Perez-Aleman (1997); Edelman (1999); Sandoval Garcia (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Nicaraguans have migrated to fulfill low-wage positions left vacant as the country expanded into service and agro-export industries with insufficient workforce. Past ethnographies (Hayden, 1994; Sandoval Garcia, 2002 and 2007) have demonstrated the reluctance of leaders to dispel notions of Nicaraguan illegality and threat, as the presence of a segregated and vulnerable migrant community permits the ongoing enjoyment of middle-class lifestyle, masking the actual dynamics of accumulation. Nussbaum-Barberena (n.d.) contends that rising xenophobia is related to their shift in destination, increasingly favoring Costa Rica’s greater metropolitan area, in the Central Valley

<sup>6</sup> This claim is rehashed internally, by politicians and everyday citizens alike, through claims to stability, anti-militarism, and universalism. Today, Nicaragua is considered among the poorest and most politically fragmented countries in Latin America, while Costa Rica is considered one of the wealthiest and most stable. Such claims ignore the way that Costa Rica’s historic stability is tied up with instability in the rest of Central America (Nussbaum-Barberena, 2016; Fouratt & Voorend, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Nussbaum-Barberena (2016), migrants noted that they were often rejected alongside derogatory slurs referring to Nicaraguans. In other cases, their interlocutors assumed they did not have papers. As Fouratt and Voorend (2018) note, for example, health care providers will often ask Nicaraguan migrant to complete additional steps or to present additional paperwork before receiving treatment.

<sup>8</sup> See Nussbaum-Barberena (2016), arguing that Nicaraguan women are treated as if posing a threat to the stability of any institution (whether public or private), as much as the nation itself. Fouratt (2014) analyzes Costa Rica’s 2006 and 2010 immigration laws, which, although billed as inclusive, framed immigration as a problem of national security.

Although I grew up in an environment that normalized domestic violence, I was afforded the right to report harm that came my family's way to the authorities and received protection. As my siblings and I fought the effects of this normality, I was exposed to the idea that this form of oppression to women was taught and naturalized, but not inevitable; I was motivated to understand my power to unlearn this way of thinking and intervene, as someone recognized by the state, through my citizenship. On the third night at the women's shelter, a mother and five children were brought to the doorstep by the police, for protection from the husband and father. The director asked me to go outside and lock the gate. I was unsettled by the distant memory of a family member being taken away by the police while, as I shut the lock, I felt that I was now confining this family to their fears and all of us to the status of criminals. Yet this was our protection against a drunken man with a machete. Then, my thoughts turned towards transforming the space, introducing a nurturing activity. I took out a ukulele and began to play for the eldest son, who was quivering in shock. I saw myself in him, old enough to understand what had happened and yet young enough to learn about what is permissible.

Witnessing this violent act alerted us to a point of disjuncture—our familiarity with the silences surrounding domestic violence in our communities and the recognition of the difference of being unafraid and able to access protective institutions. It resonated with us, as we are aware of these points of divergence between ourselves, as citizens, college students and fluent speakers of English, in comparison with other members of the immigrant community. It opened our eyes to the ways that the organized Nicaraguan women we admired, united against gendered violence, were considered radical and indecent by their communities, on top of the hostility they face as Nicaraguans daily. Here we encountered a final point of privilege: we found that when we sought out these women to discuss their experiences and support their organizing efforts, community members welcomed our presence while treating organized migrant women as suspects. Despite sharing multiple identities as Latina women from disadvantaged backgrounds, our freedoms and restrictions differed drastically. This realization shocked us but also provided a lesson about the ways in which privileges translate across cultural and physical borders.

At the end of our stay on the border of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, retaining ideals of commonality and solidarity, we experienced the varied, complex, and conditional ways of inhabiting brown bodies. This arrangement allowed us to move beyond simplistic “appreciation of cultural difference” in which much of global education is rooted, toward understanding the intertwined structures in which our contextually contingent ethnic, gender, and activist identities are embedded.

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# DIVERSITY MATTERS: IMPACTS OF A DIVERSE STUDY ABROAD COHORT ON INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

**AMIR REZA, PHD** | Vice Provost, International & Multicultural Education

**LORIEN ROMITO** | Director, Education Abroad

Babson College

**Today, higher education is tasked with the preparation of future citizens within an increasingly interdependent world. An understanding of socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and national identities will be necessary for tomorrow’s citizens in their social and professional lives. As a result of this imperative, we are seeing rapid internationalization taking place at institutions of higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007) and “intercultural competence development is emerging as a central focus – and outcome – of many internationalization efforts” (Deardorff & Jones, 2012, p. 283). Additionally, there is a push to create a learning environment that is diverse, reflected in the student, faculty, and staff bodies, in order to best prepare graduates for global citizenship (American Council on Education, 2012).**

We can extrapolate these imperatives to education abroad, especially if we want to ensure that program design and learning outcomes are relevant in the larger higher education context. Education abroad has long been viewed as a primary tool utilized to enhance intercultural competence, with varying degrees of success. In recent years, there has also been a push to diversify education abroad participation. As we strive to make the education abroad learning environment more representative of present-day college and university student bodies, and as we continue to strive for intercultural competence development, how should we, as education abroad practitioners, shift program design?

A recent study (Reza, 2015) helps us explore these questions further. Research conducted at Babson College on the BRIC: The Cornerstone of the New Global Economy (BRIC) program shows that

program design—specifically, the diversity of the cohort—plays an important role in intercultural competence development. BRIC is a multi-destination, semester-long program where 24 students spend one month in Russia, China, and India, respectively. A distinct feature of the BRIC program that distinguishes it from other semester abroad opportunities is that the participants travel, reside, and learn together as a cohort. Courses are taught by Babson faculty and combine traditional classroom discussion, business visits, and cultural excursions relevant to the business and liberal arts courses offered. Additionally, students take an intercultural communication course, providing an opportunity for students to reflect on their lived experiences in new cultural environments and when encountering “others.”

Using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), journals, and interviews, the study collected

qualitative and quantitative data to answer the following research questions:

- Does participation in a multi-destination study abroad program influence students' intercultural competence?
- What features of a multi-destination study abroad program influence students' intercultural competence?

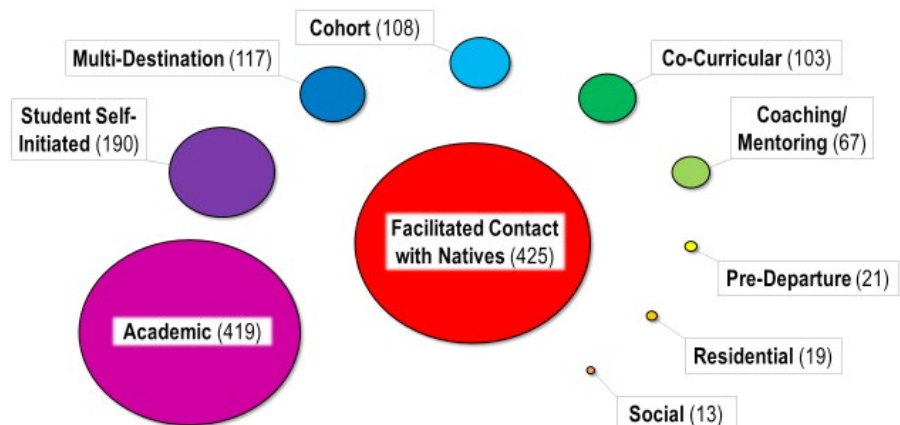
The IDI (Hammer et al., 2003), an instrument designed to reliably measure the stages of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1993), was administered to students pre- and post-participation on the BRIC program.

The study utilized journals and interviews for qualitative data. The faculty of this course provided periodic prompts, which were reflections on observations in and interactions with their host culture and classroom. During the final week of the program semi-structured interviews were held with each participant. Of the 21 juniors and seniors who participated in the study, 11 were female, 10 were male, six were international, and five were from the United States. Participants identified as Black, Asian, White and multi-racial, represented six different faiths, and spoke eight languages, collectively.

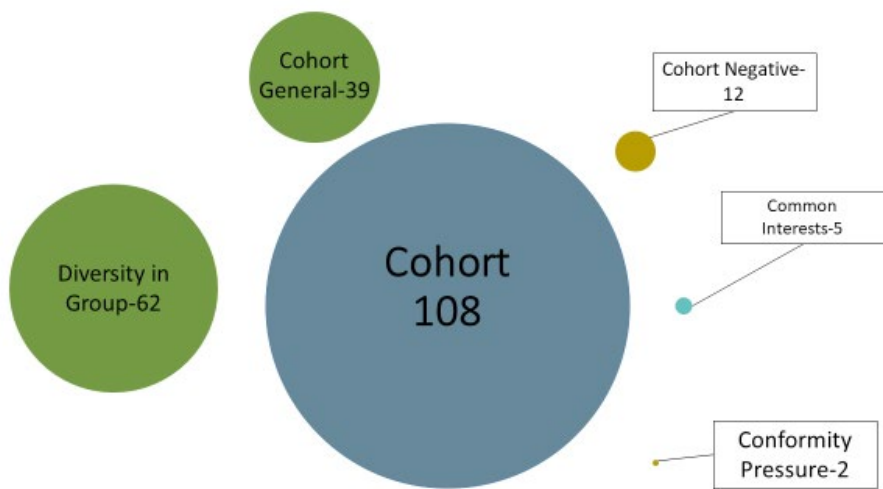
Quantitative findings of the study, represented by comparing pre and post IDI scores, showed significant gains in intercultural competence. For example, the majority of the students, prior to their participation on BRIC, fell within Minimization (12), Polarization (2), or Denial (2). Only five students were in Acceptance and none were in Adaptation. After BRIC, however, all of the students were in Minimization (6), Acceptance (5), or Adaptation (5) (Bennett, 1993). The average gains, as reflected in IDI results for the group, were 24.45 points, which was a 25% increase from pre- to post-program results. Statistical analysis indicated that the gains were significant.

Perhaps more interesting and informative for education abroad practitioners, as we explore program design, were the qualitative data results and analysis of the study. The quantitative findings suggest that the participants made significant advances in their intercultural development; however, the IDI results cannot indicate or pinpoint which features of the BRIC program were influential in their development. In this study, the features of the BRIC program that were linked to intercultural development in interviews and journals are represented in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

### 10 INFLUENTIAL FEATURES OF BRIC



**Figure 1.** Influential Features of BRIC. This figure illustrates the frequency of features that were coded for intercultural development in journals and interviews.



**Figure 2.** Sub-Features of Cohort. This figure illustrates the frequency of the sub-features that were coded within the cohort feature of BRIC.

Figure 1 illustrates which components of the program were most frequently linked to intercultural development. The size of the circle corresponds with the frequency that each feature was linked to intercultural development in the text of the journals and interview transcripts.

Each feature was broken down further into sub-features. For example, Figure 2 provides a visual estimation of the sub-features of the cohort experience. While several sub-features were identified within the Cohort feature, the diversity of participants was a salient and important theme. The narratives of the participants pointed to the variety of identities represented in their group, including gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, native language, faith, and socio-economic status.

The importance of the diversity of the cohort in this study is apparent in Figure 2, given that the majority of linkages to intercultural development resulting from cohort engagement were linked to diversity of the cohort. The participants relayed many stories about how they were utilizing the cultural frameworks and culturally relevant readings from BRIC to inform their interactions with peers who had very different identities from their own. For instance, when they explored

cultural identity, the diversity of the cohort provided many examples for discussion about the complexity of identity of all individuals, which was eye-opening to students who were more likely to stereotype others prior to understanding this framework. They were able to ask questions and challenge each other given the safe, in-group atmosphere established by the program. Furthermore, they were able to share perspectives on how their own struggles with identity development had commonalities with their peers. In particular, students who had some linkage with the host country (through heritage, language, or in some instances, nationality) expressed their struggles with the cohort because they were seen as the go-between for the rest of the group and their 'home' country. For example, a student with Chinese heritage and fluency in Mandarin expressed that she often found herself explaining the cultural nuances of China, even though she didn't fully consider herself mainland Chinese. At the same time, her peers expressed appreciation and provided examples of how her presence in the program gave them insight into Chinese cultural practices that were confusing and strange.

Another way that diversity in the cohort was instrumental in the participants' development

was the understanding of minority versus majority status within a community and how these constructs can create social and economic inequalities. Participants were able to expand their understanding of nuances within a culture to better grasp the sub-cultural themes, and upon reflection they discovered new ways of seeing sub-cultures within their own communities.

This research offers important considerations for future education abroad program design. The cohort feature, often referred to as an “island” program (Mahajeri Norris & Dwyer, 2005) is frequently criticized for creating a ‘bubble’ that keeps the students from engaging with the local environment. At the same time much of the growth in education abroad is in short, faculty-led cohort programs (Institute of International Education, 2017); therefore, we must find ways to continue to develop students on these types of programs. The findings of this study suggest that educators should be intentional about the diversity of the student cohort that travels abroad to

maximize intercultural and identity development. It is important to acknowledge a recent study titled “Engaging With Diversity: How Positive and Negative Diversity Interactions Influence Students’ Cognitive Outcomes” that reminds us that without support, skilled facilitation, or intentional program design, negative diversity interactions can hinder students’ learning (Tate, 2017). However, with a well-designed, high-touch, cohort-based program, interactions across race, gender, and nationality are much more likely than in their home campus environment, and these interactions can be very influential in the students’ intercultural competence development beyond what a homogeneous cohort can offer. These findings suggest that just as a diverse student body is a compelling educational imperative for U.S. campuses (Antonio et al., 2004), a diverse student cohort is important for student learning while abroad. Therefore, educators should strive to diversify cohorts of education abroad participants as they continue to fine-tune program designs in order to have maximum impact on intercultural development.

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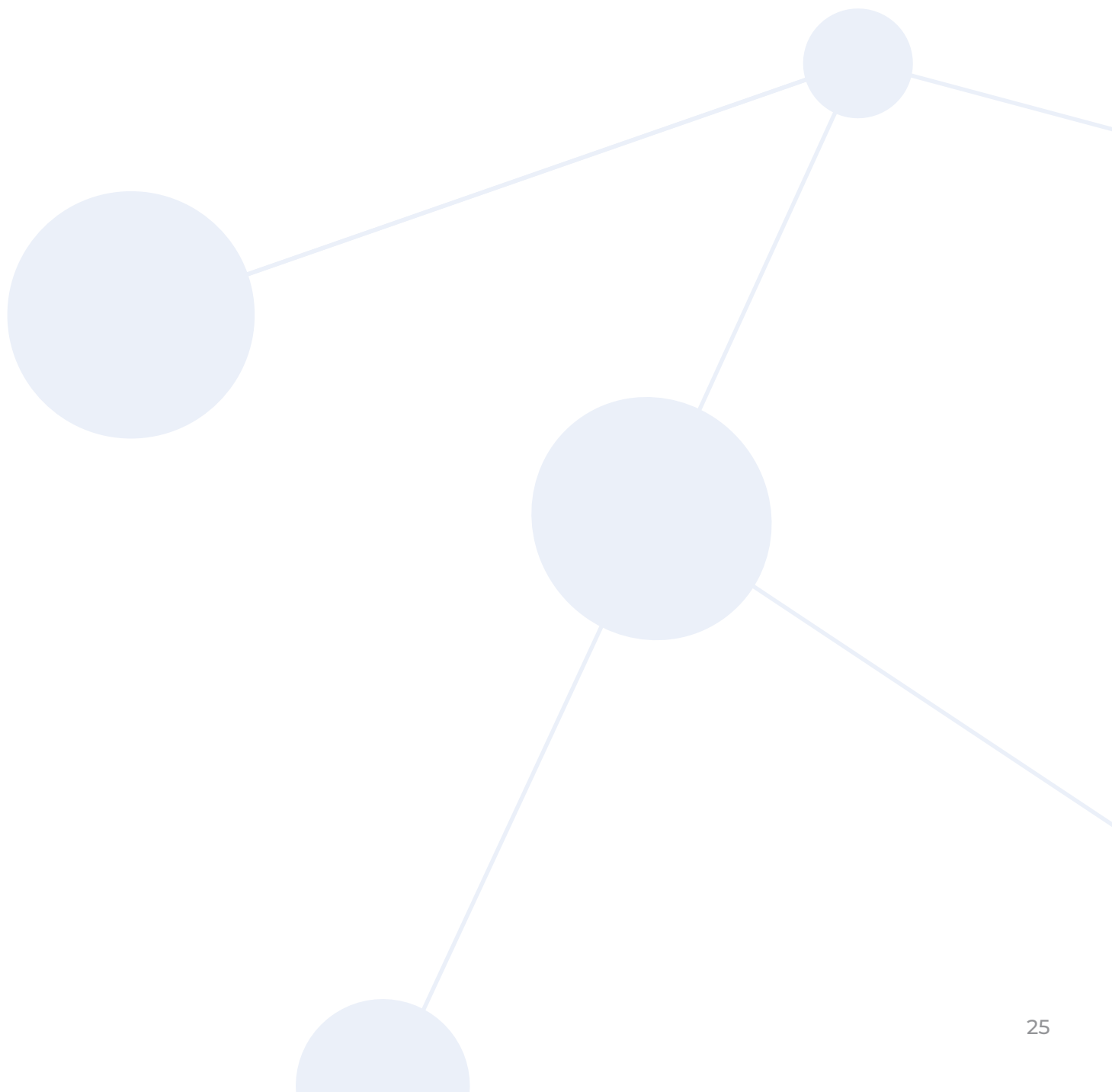


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# THE COMMONALITIES THAT MAKE US DIFFERENT: AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY IN CAMEROON AND GHANA

<b>TIFFANY SMITH</b>	Organizational, Leadership, and Policy Development		University of Minnesota
<b>SHAKITA THOMAS KPETAY</b>	Curriculum and Instruction		
<b>BODUNRIN BANWO</b>	Organizational, Leadership, and Policy Development		
<b>BRANDON HIGGINS</b>	LSW, Eskenazi Health	Midtown Community Mental Health	

## Internationalization in higher education

Higher educational leaders primarily focus on internationalization through study abroad initiatives (Altbach & Knight, 2007), and the proportion of U.S. minority students studying abroad has increased modestly. Of the 325,339 participants in 2017, nearly six percent are African American (Institute of International Education, 2017). McGaskey (2015) suggests that doctoral students engage in study abroad programs to fulfill roles that will allow them to become competent academics. Yet, study abroad programs, specific to doctoral students, are relatively rare and little is known about the experiences of graduate students and how such programs influence them (Green, 2017).

## Intersectionality and cultural comparison

We recount our experiences and challenges as four African American, first-year doctoral students participating in an eight-week international internship in Bamenda, Cameroon. During its fifth year of operation, we were the first African American cohort that were selected to engage in community programming that centered on

creating teacher preparation workshops, micro-lending and farming with a primary focus on bee farming, and youth work with emphasis on sensitization and widowhood. Our primary goal was to facilitate and cultivate knowledge exchange. Preparation, organized through the program coordinator, consisted of debriefing sessions with Cameroonians in the U.S. with previous involvement in the program and with past participants. An additional two and a half weeks were spent in Ghana to engage in cultural activities that would influence deeper connections into our identities. Most of our time was spent in Accra and Berekuso.

Upon our arrival in May, citizens of Bamenda, Cameroon refused to send their children to school as we entered Cameroon during a time of a public strike that had been active for eight months. Bamenda is the minority English speaking area of Cameroon. Each Monday, we participated in a “no-movement” day or “ghost town day” with the local people. Communities were advised not to frequent local businesses, as everything was meant to shut down. For us, ghost town days resulted in deeper engagement with the local community.

Our experiences are situated in intersectionality and focus on how “lived identities, structural systems, sites of marginalization, forms of power,

and modes of resistance ‘intersect’ in dynamic and shifting ways” (May, 2015, p. 22). We emphasize a collection of individual yet intersectional ways of knowing (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). New questions concerning power, inequality, and marginalization developed as a result of rejecting limited definitions and integrating a more thorough look at patterns of structural inequality (Carbado, et. al, 2013).

A recurring theme that we describe as cultural comparison derived from our data. Cultural comparison highlights reflections of socialization, as we found that much of our data centered on comparing our experience in America to the experiences that we were engaged in in Cameroon and Ghana. Brandon, who identifies as a biracial American with European and African heritage, has a background in social work. Before arrival, Brandon conducted his ancestry test and discovered his six percent ancestry connection to Cameroon. *“I was thinking that, I would find more things about Cameroon that allowed me to feel Black, but I feel like being in Cameroon has ... blinded me. I’m being reminded of how American I am.... It’s my culture versus this culture; my way of thinking versus this way of thinking..”* Cameroonians often shouted “white man” when they engaged with him. Reflecting on this perceived privilege as an American and also as a “white man,” he knew that embodiment of the “black man” would return in the United States.

Intersecting with the LGBTQ community, Bo, who has a father from Nigeria and a mother from the United States, recounts, *“I actually really have been hating straight clubs here and by there being no gay clubs... I feel stuck... in a place where I truly can’t be myself.”* Discovering phone applications that suggested a presence of the LGBTQ community, Bo attempted to connect with similar people who shared this identity. Essentially, he perceived Cameroon and Ghana to have an invisible LGBTQ

community and as an outsider he was not afforded the privilege of entering it.

Shakita, a person of Christian faith has worked in education with middle- and high-school students: *“The service was quite similar to an African American service in the U.S. ... I just felt right at home there. I was not expecting the church to be as long (4 hours); however, it was worth it.”* Shakita felt a spiritual connection in both places, but still faced issues with power dynamics between herself and those that she encountered. She perceived Cameroon and Ghana to be mostly of Christian faith. In contrast, Shakita interacted with people of different faiths (Rastafari and Islam). In Ghana, the church service, which is normally conducted in the local language, was interpreted into English for her. She appreciated it; however, Shakita questioned why.

Ghana, often seen as a “return to home” for some African Americans, sparked a cultural comparative for Tiffany, a teacher who has over eight years of domestic and international experience. *“I watched people drive past in their nice cars and dating at nice restaurants as I continued to count my budget. I wondered if people were living a better life in Accra than I am living in Minneapolis ... there was no way that someone living in Africa could be living a better lifestyle than me.”* Tiffany realized her assumption that she had been taught to believe about Africa. She assumed normalcy for Ghanaians to see Americans with possession of assets and better living conditions. However, she struggled to see them with more.

## Implications for doctoral students in study abroad

For us, embodying African American identity in Cameroon and Ghana presented questioning and resistance to dominant narratives that have historically framed Africa in a deficit portrayal. Due to the few accounts from African American doctoral students, little attention has been paid to the complexity of African American doctoral student experiences abroad. Our primary intention for travel was to enhance our cultural competencies, which we believed would impact the trajectory of our future careers. We were unaware that this experience would allow us to capture the complexities and varying levels of privilege and oppression that we possess. Through our international engagement, it is necessary to complicate the notion that Black people are monolithic and that we all share the same experiences in the same spaces.

Due to the limits of how study abroad is often discussed, we find difficulty in situating our experiences and voices. Doctoral students often only engage internationally as a means for data collection. Additionally, research in study abroad traditionally focuses on the undergraduate experience, and for this, we propose a need to develop genres within study abroad participation. It is important for doctoral students to share their experiences abroad. As future producers of knowledge, these encounters impact how we come to understand our own epistemologies and positionalities in how we view the world, which essentially impacts the research that we produce.

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[members@diversitynetwork.org](mailto:members@diversitynetwork.org)

510-982-0635 ext 704

[www.diversitynetwork.org](http://www.diversitynetwork.org)