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THE GLOBAL IMPACT EXCHANGE

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SUMMER 2020 EDITION

**TAKING A LOOK INWARD:
STRENGTHS-BASED
APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**



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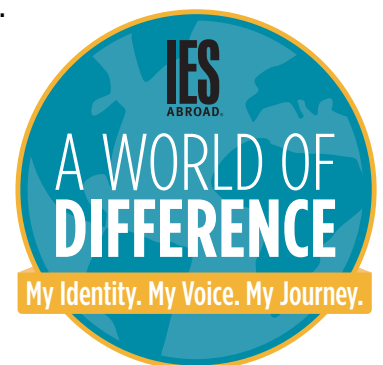




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PUBLICATION INFORMATION




The Global Impact Exchange

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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.

Acknowledgments

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Summer 2020 Edition: **Taking a Look Inward: Strengths-Based Approaches to Supporting Student Engagement**

Published July 2020

Students from diverse and traditionally marginalized communities in typical higher education spaces may be uniquely poised for success in global education experiences. At the same time, these students may face unique challenges throughout the decision-making to returnee phases. As global educators create, identify, and distribute resources geared to support and address issues impacting diverse populations of students, how do we do so in a manner that identifies systemic and institutional barriers, rather than adopting a deficit model that may focus on perceived barriers of the diverse student population themselves? What are strengths-based approaches to enhancing diverse students' success and participation in global education opportunities? How can International Educators draw upon relevant frameworks in program design, research-based advising techniques, and other promising practices and thought leadership toward this end?

INTRODUCTION



By **JOELLE TOLIFERO**

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Diversity Abroad

When I take a look inward I see the strengths: arranger, individualization, activator, futuristic, empathy. These five strengths, as indicated by the Gallup StrengthsFinder assessment, tell us that I care deeply about people. This specific combination of strengths shows that I want to understand people and put them in the right place for their long-term success. Oftentimes, as educators and advisors we focus solely on the strengths or deficits of our students and do not take time to examine where we can look inward in order to support all members of our student community.

We know that diverse and traditionally marginalized students in typical higher education spaces may be uniquely positioned for success in global education because of their experience navigating multicultural spaces in their home countries or identity as an international student enrolled in a U.S. institution. We also know that their identities may position them to face unique challenges while navigating the global process. So we at Diversity Abroad ask as you continue to engage with these articles, how can you use your strengths to support and develop the strengths of your diverse students? And how do we do so in a manner that identifies systemic and institutional barriers, rather than adopting a deficit model that may focus on perceived barriers for our students?

Research says that people are more likely to succeed by leveraging their strengths. As advisors and global educators it is imperative that we understand the strengths that we hold individually

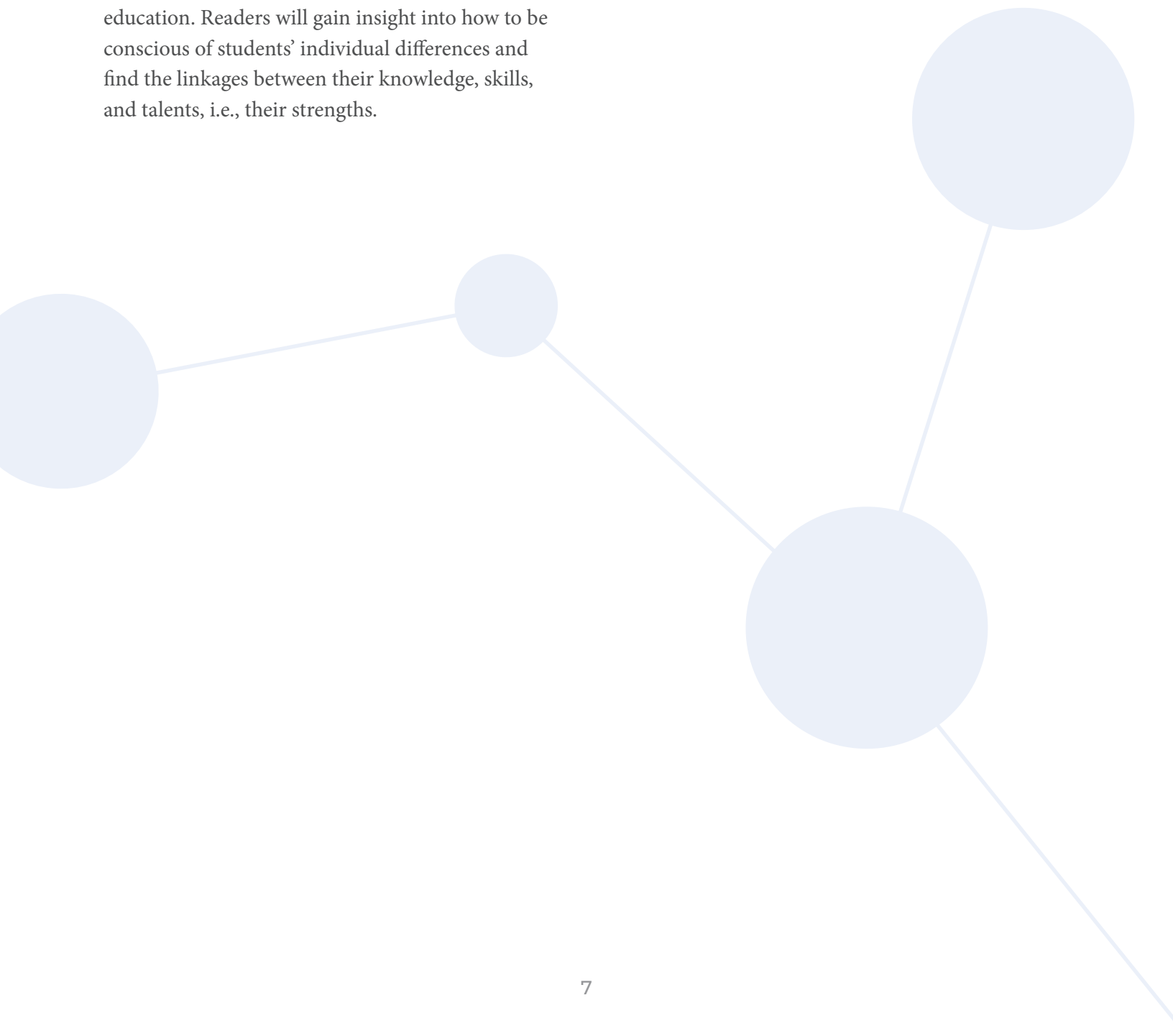
and model how to leverage those strengths for the diverse students we support. We can do this by engaging in our professional development around the topics of inequality, oppression, and implicit bias. Now more than ever it is important for educators to equip themselves with the tools to both grow in their own strengths around these pressing issues and support students to do the same. We have the opportunity to advise students without putting the realities of racial injustice, prejudice, or discrimination at the forefront of their experience, and instead we can recognize the impact of these systems of oppression while elevating each student's individual strengths.

Operating in a strengths-based system for yourself and your advisees will greatly benefit diverse students' global education experiences. By understanding the strengths of your students through a differentiated approach you can advise diverse students to seek opportunities that will

not only include them but will aim to support them equitably. Ultimately this sets them up for a lifelong understanding of what strengths they hold, how they can leverage those strengths to constructively navigate institutions, and how they can thrive beyond the classroom and in the global workforce.

The articles in this edition of the Global Impact Exchange will provide an opportunity for readers to take this 'look inward' and gain examples of strengths-based approaches that have positively impacted diverse students' participation in global education. Readers will gain insight into how to be conscious of students' individual differences and find the linkages between their knowledge, skills, and talents, i.e., their strengths.

We look forward to your engagement with this edition of the Global Impact Exchange and want to hear your thoughts. Please share your reflections and ideas with us at [@diversityabroad](https://twitter.com/diversityabroad) and members@diversityabroad.org. Diversity Abroad members are invited to join the conversation in the online community forums.



NOT NECESSARILY LOST IN TRANSLATION: DEAF STUDENTS ON STUDY ABROAD

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I work at Gallaudet University, the world's only university designed to be barrier-free for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and it's my responsibility to help our students find opportunities to explore the globe through international internships, study abroad programs, and fellowships.

Although it's not in my job description, I field calls weekly from advisors at other universities who are working with a deaf, deafblind, or hard-of-hearing student for the first time. These advisors usually have the best of intentions and want to find a way to provide access to education abroad programs for these students even though the Americans with Disabilities Act doesn't guarantee accommodations outside the United States. Unfortunately, despite the best of intentions, it's not uncommon for the advisor to engage with the student from a deficit-based perspective. This happens, in part, because nearly all of the conference presentations and written information regarding the participation of Deaf students (and students with disabilities in general) in education abroad focus on the additional support and additional resources that these students need just to gain equal access to a program.

While providing accommodations to increase access and making adjustments to ensure a program is culturally inclusive is commendable, too often the process of providing equal access becomes so all-encompassing that advisors miss out on the ways a student's Deaf identity also provides them with strengths and benefits that

make them great candidates for study abroad. In contrast to advising from a deficit-based perspective, strengths-based advising is rooted in the assumption that students have capabilities and talents that should be identified, supported, and strengthened throughout their educational careers. When conversations with study abroad advisors focus solely on accommodations and not on a student's interests, passions, and talents, Deaf students can feel as if they don't (or won't) belong on a program.

In this regard, it's important for education abroad advisors to understand that Deaf students themselves often see their identity as a positive. "For many people, the words 'deaf' and 'hard of hearing' are not negative. Instead, the term 'hearing-impaired' is viewed as negative. The term focuses on what people can't do." "Uppercase D" Deaf, however, is a term that implies a shared language, culture, and identity, and *Deaf Gain* is a term that references the benefits of being Deaf.

The students I work with at Gallaudet have shown me how Deaf Gain applies to study abroad. I have seen firsthand a number of skills that my students have that make them particularly well suited for

¹ National Association of the Deaf (2020) "Community and Culture – Frequently Asked Questions." Retrieved from <https://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/community-and-culture-frequently-asked-questions/>

study abroad. They are excellent communicators, accustomed to adaptation, and have experience advocating for themselves—all things that help make them the kind of students who can and will succeed when living abroad in a new environment that challenges their worldview.

For many students, studying abroad may be the first time they are living in a country where they don't know the language fluently, or at all. A lack of ability to make themselves understood may make students anxious and impatient in a way that they haven't felt before—a feeling that may compound the culture shock of study abroad. Deaf ASL users, however, live every day in a country that doesn't use their language, and yet they always find ways to order a coffee or catch a cab. They are accustomed to using alternative methods of communication, like texting through an app on a phone, writing on a piece of paper, or gesturing to make themselves understood. Their experience communicating across barriers is especially helpful when traveling to countries where English isn't the first language and where conversations require extra patience to achieve understanding.

In addition to being expert communicators, most Deaf students have experience being the only person of their identity in a room. For students whose main identities are common to their campus or to their community, a study abroad program may be one of the first times in their lives that they are thrown into an environment where they are the minority. Deaf students, meanwhile, already have some experience being “an outsider” and they may actually have some comfort with the reality of being a visitor in another cultural community.

Deaf students also have a lifetime of experience advocating for themselves. For many students, asking for help or support is something they've come to believe is a weakness. On study abroad, students don't have their typical support systems and may need to reach out for help from

individuals they've only just met. In order to get equal access in many facets of their lives, Deaf students have considerable experience recognizing their needs, identifying the right place or person to speak with, and making an ask. Their self-advocacy experience serves them well when living abroad without their usual support systems.

Of course, these traits are by no means universal in the Deaf community. Moreover, discrimination and lack of access can affect a student's confidence, skillset, and much more. Nevertheless, many Deaf students have skills that make them the kind of resilient, flexible, and agile individuals who typically thrive in a study abroad program. Using a strengths-based advising approach to frame our work as international educators, we can structure our advising process to challenge growth and build on the strengths of the students we engage—including those we might typically approach from a deficit-perspective. In doing so, we break down our own biases and we model this for other students to do the same as they engage with new cultures and communities. By engaging in strengths-based advising we can also make sure that Deaf students are able to recognize their own talents and are able to advocate for their needs in a self-empowering manner.

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ASSET-BASED APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING THE EDUCATION ABROAD EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION LOW-INCOME STUDENTS IN AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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Education abroad (EA) experiences offer tremendous long-term gains for college students by influencing their personal growth, career paths, and overall worldview (Dwyer & Peters, 2004). According to Dwyer and Peters (2004), college students report increased maturity and self-confidence, stronger awareness and understanding of their personal biases, an interest in exploring other cultures, and improved intercultural skills upon engaging in EA programs. Thus, educators, colleges, parents, and employers should, as a priority, support young people to gain access to and participate in EA programs.

Research suggests that, unfortunately, minority students, including first-generation low-income students (FGLISs), are often unable to explore EA opportunities. Low-income students can be described as students living in “extreme poverty” and many other forms of disadvantages (Banya & Elu, 2001; Effah, 2011; Mohamedbhai, 2014; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Gupton et al. (2009, p. 244) define FGLISs as “students whose parents have not earned a bachelor’s degree.” In addition to being the first in their families to go to college, these students also face other significant hurdles, including economic, social, and systemic barriers.

Other critical barriers that stand in their way include a knowledge gap of the existence of EA programs and what it takes to access them (Blinn, 2019; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Thayer, 2000). Likewise, lower levels of academic preparedness affect their overall GPAs and consequently hinder their eligibility. Also, multiple financial obligations may make FGLISs see EA programs as an additional expense rather than an investment (Blinn, 2019; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Thayer, 2000).

Looking Inward: Using Strengths-Based Approaches to Support FGLISs

Deficit ideology, as defined by Gorski (2011), is “a sort of ‘blame-the-victim’ narrative used to assess an entire group of people by focusing on what they lack” (p. 154). Adjei (2019) further explains that a deficit approach means that “FGLISs, therefore, suffer negative systemic labeling based on barriers that they have to overcome, without an examination of the sociopolitical and systemic institutional structures which favor one class over the other” (p. 23). Hence, there is a need for a more intentional strengths-based approach to understanding the assets FGLISs already possess, which can be drawn upon to help them participate in EA opportunities.

Some research has established that marginalized groups bring to the table a unique blend of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2015) and the Capacity to “Hustle” (Adjei, 2019), which could offer insights into actions that institutions can take to better support FGLISs. These

comprise navigational skills and abilities, open-mindedness, resiliency, hope, endurance, and the ability to persist and “figure things out” (Adjei, 2019), which are essential attributes but are often unrecognized or unvalued in traditional cultural capital theories (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lareau & Wieninger, 2003).

A Strengths-Based Approach to Supporting FGLISs: The Case of Ashesi University

To illustrate the value of an intentional, strengths-based approach to understanding and supporting FGLISs, we discuss strategies used by Ashesi University, a private, non-profit liberal arts university in Ghana. Ashesi has supported and increased the participation of its FGLISs in various EA programs such as exchange programs, international conferences and internships, and short-term faculty-led initiatives.

Ashesi embarks on several intentional strategies such as institutional funding, including affirmative action through financial aid. There are also support campaigns including tailored advising, targeted awareness creation and exposure to various EA programs, and peer mentoring from students from diverse backgrounds who have taken advantage of various EA opportunities. In the ensuing sections, we highlight these unique interventions the University has pursued to ensure equitable participation of its FGLISs in various EA programs.

Institutional Background

Ashesi is a pan-African university committed to educating a diverse pool of students. It continually updates its policies and practices to ensure holistic support for its diverse student populations. Ashesi’s affirmative action policy currently supports 43% of its students from socio-economically disadvantaged

backgrounds through financial aid programs. Financial aid and scholarships are offered to high-achieving students who demonstrate financial need based on four categories defined by the institution: extreme, high, medium, or low need. Ashesi defines its FGLISs as students who fall into the extreme and high need categories and require full funding to support their comprehensive college education. This funding includes their EA opportunities through the International Engagement Fund (IEF) for students on the MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program (MCFSP).

Interventions to Support the EA Experiences of FGLISs

Early Awareness Creation and Exposure to EA programs

The Office of Diversity & International Programs (ODIP) runs several information sessions to educate students on the available resources and the processes to access them. The sessions also prepare students to encourage and demystify any misconceptions, especially for many FGLISs who may feel these opportunities are far-fetched from their realities. A student explains:

I was hesitant to apply for the study abroad program because of financial constraints; however, after attending a session organized by the ODIP, where I got fundraising tips, I was able to raise funds from external sources as well as MCF’s opportunity fund to finance my study abroad. (Josephine Amankwah, Connecticut College, Fall 2019).

Tailored Advising Interventions

In addition to providing general EA advising for all students, the ODIP also tailors its advising towards mitigating the unique barriers of FGLISs, such as guiding them in acquiring passports. Pre-departure processes and orientation are helpful, as many FGLISs tend to have limited international travel experiences. These one-on-one advising sessions include taking the required courses and prerequisites to enhance their eligibility and utilizing other campus resources such as the writing center and career services. Michael Dzine (Mälardalen University, Fall 2019) shared, “The ODIP was like that older family member who has experienced everything and is guiding you in every decision that you make to ensure you have a valuable experience.”

International Engagement Pals Peer Mentoring Program

Students who complete various EA programs serve as peer advisors, known as International Engagement (IE) Pals, to their colleagues interested in embarking on similar experiences. They are a great resource, especially for FGLISs, who are empowered by their shared backgrounds. “I had lots of questions and fears about going abroad; however, my IE Pal provided me with the necessary information which enabled me to avoid the mistakes she made and ensured I had a fascinating experience of my own,” said Portia Awuah (Mälardalen University, Fall 2019).

Additionally, students indicated that the knowledge gained from the EA process helped in accessing more opportunities. For instance, alum and MCF Scholar Eugene Afranie '17 explained:

The ODIP exposed me to a myriad of international education, and professional

opportunities and my decision to apply for the Swarthmore Study Abroad Program and [later, the] internship program with Bank of America Merrill Lynch was fueled by the multiple students' stories and experiences I had heard during various ODIP events. I received fundamental tools that remain relevant, even post-graduation. Presently, as I prepare to attend graduate school in the USA, the ODIP visa application checklist and pre-departure orientation notes have been one of my vital tools in transitioning back to school life

The students explained that receiving these interventions from different institutional agents and structured ODIP programs helped them gain critical skills that they continue to draw on when pursuing other EA opportunities.

Conclusion

The experiences of the FGLISs in this paper affirm our earlier assertion that FGLISs have significant strengths and navigational capacities to “figure out” the EA process and actively participate in it once they are exposed and intentionally guided to access these opportunities. Through the example of Ashesi University in Ghana, we offer reasons for which institutions must adopt an intentional blend of strategies to support FGLISs in engaging globally. By intentionally supporting FGLISs throughout the EA processes, institutions will be able to ensure equitable access to international education for all students.

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REPURPOSING MARGINALIZATION

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Intercultural Programs Advisor

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Navigating Eurocentric institutions of higher education can be alienating, exhausting, and play an outsized role in sustaining the opportunity gap that persists for students of color compared to their white peers. Yet that same institutional barrier may unintentionally position students of color to be uniquely suited to maximize service-learning experiences. Matriculating through predominantly white institutions forces students of color to develop resiliency strategies and assets as a means of survival, including the concept of *cultural humility*.

Cultural humility is defined slightly differently depending on the field it is being applied to, but the core principle is the realization that one cannot and will not ever fully be “competent” in another culture, but that one should still embark on a lifelong journey to further their understanding anyway (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). It is a concept that first was developed in the healthcare education field and has slowly made its way into the humanities. It evolved out of the previous construct of “cultural competence” that is both limiting and imperialistic in its assumption that one could fully understand another culture without being a participant in and/or a member of it. Fisher-Borne, Cain, and Martin (2015) challenge cultural competency, claiming it “suggests that knowing broad descriptions of various group identities can translate into knowing the life experiences of an individual client. This ‘other’ focus also assumes that the ‘locus of normalcy’ is White” (p. 170). Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, for many years the education abroad field pursued cultural competency as its ultimate benchmark. However, particularly in the service-learning realm, education abroad has begun to view itself more critically through an ethical lens and has begun to embrace cultural humility as a replacement for cultural competence

as a primary learning objective. This predisposes students who have already accumulated some development in cultural humility as outstanding fits for these programs, positioning them for success and potential leadership opportunities within the cohort.

Growing up in the United States has required students of color to be aware of the dominant, white culture, particularly in relation to that culture’s persistent marginalization of their own. This is especially true in terms of this nation’s education system. College admissions tests have been crafted in a cultural code that is intrinsically foreign to many of them (Rosales, 2018). There is a startling lack of representation in faculty, staff, and the student bodies of most of our higher education institutions, which leads to the perpetuation of the “hidden curriculum” (Jackson, 1966) that white students have enjoyed since elementary school. Students of color have successfully navigated these environments, whether they are aware or not, by utilizing cultural humility.

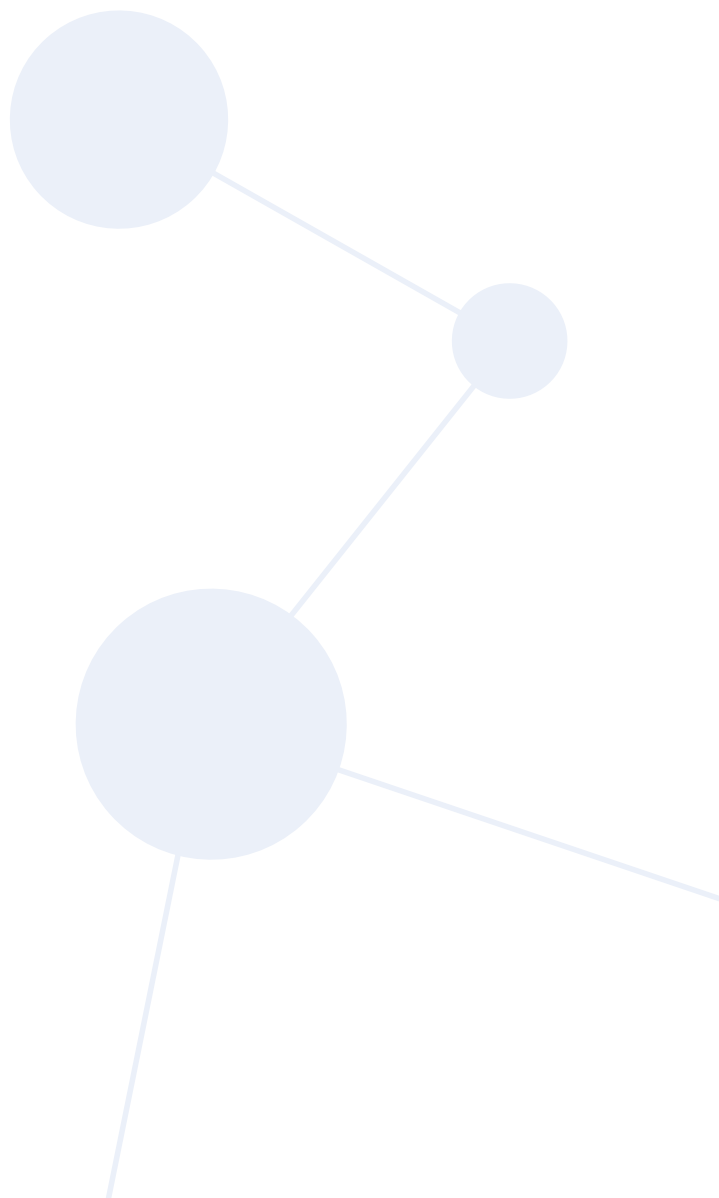
This experience in navigating institutional marginalization can carry great utility for students as they embark on their global journeys, particularly on service learning programs in non-traditional locations. These abroad

experiences tend to interact much more intensely and intentionally with locals than typical study abroad programs, providing a student high in cultural humility an opportunity to thrive. These experiences also tend to induce a greater deal of culture shock as students move from a more Eurocentric way of life to that of the local community. Students of color may be more prepared than their white counterparts for this, as many of them manage a similar culture shock when matriculating into higher education institutions. Their successful experience in navigating this transition domestically can be utilized to construct a strengths-based perspective toward navigating this transition globally.

As we move forward with making education abroad more diverse, equitable, and inclusive, we must highlight and develop advising and pre-departure practices that accentuate this intercultural asset. Many of these students have been inundated with the deficit perspective from a variety of angles. Advising with a strengths-based approach can offer a way to repurpose some of the struggles associated with being in a hostile campus environment to shift students' mental model of an abroad experience and give them the confidence to participate. Our pre-departure needs to also reflect cultural humility and its importance. Interactive exercises where we purposefully explore identity, its dynamic nature, and how it relates to culture, both in an internally reflective and group sharing format, can be powerful and purposeful. Constructing a framework that details cultural competence and cultural humility, and the ways they differ, is also an important tool that can be used. We must illustrate to our students that the barriers that prevent them from studying abroad are very similar to the barriers that prevented them from matriculating into higher education. Yet, here they stand.

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THE SUSQUEHANNA MODEL OF STRENGTHS-BASED CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING GOALS

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Creating meaningful cross-cultural leaning opportunities requires purposeful planning. Focusing on student strengths within a context of intercultural development is one way to do this. This paper describes the learning goals of a strengths-based model of cross-cultural education that was started at Susquehanna University in 2009. This model draws on a theory of intervention developed in the field of social work, the Strengths Perspective (Saleebey, 1992). At Susquehanna University, all students must complete an off-campus cross-cultural (study away) requirement in order to graduate. A strengths-based approach is an important element that makes universal participation possible.

Social Work is a profession devoted to assisting people who are most marginalized and in need. Social workers practice in many different settings and with many different types of clients. In order to function effectively in so many different venues, most social workers employ a specific set of generalizable skills and theories. The Strengths Perspective is an important innovation in social work theory that directs professional helpers away from a pathology focus to a focus on an individual's strengths.

This kind of strengths focus was first developed in community mental health settings as a radical departure from a "medical model" preoccupied with personal deficits, weakness, blame, and stigma (Saleebey, 1992; Weick, Rapp, Sullivan, & Kisthardt, 1989). A Strengths Perspectives moves the focus away from the problem, and it privileges the capacities, hopes, and opportunities (i.e., strengths) of people who are struggling. It is a powerful tool that has since been adapted to

work in all areas of social work practice (Rapp & Sullivan, 2014). In cross-cultural education, this focus on strengths can move us towards maximum access to programs, and it can help us to move away from tradition distinctions of "who can" and "who can't" or "who should" and "who shouldn't" study off campus.

Strengths can be found in any individual or system. Strengths can be thought of as internal resources (abilities, dreams, confidence) or resources in the environment (tangible assets, social supports, potential opportunities) (Rapp & Gorscha, 2012). A skillful application of the Strengths Perspective will not ignore the reality of problems. In fact, the problem becomes the organizing context for a careful exploration of strengths (Saleebey, 1996). Strengths-based social workers are interested in understanding when and how the problem has been dealt with in the past. They are interested in understanding how strengths from other areas of life can be harnessed and deployed into new areas.

Social workers want to emphasize, belabor, and inflate the person's strengths to the point that they systematically overwhelm the problem (Saleebey, 1992). A strengths focus does not ignore hard realities; it just doesn't ignore human potential to overcome obstacles and work towards change.

A strengths focus assumes that every person has strengths, even those who seem most hopeless or helpless. Practicing from a Strengths Perspective means respecting strengths and being curious about their origins. Strengths-based practitioners understand that motivation is enhanced by fostering and enhancing strengths (Rapp & Gorscha, 2012). Similarly, struggle in life is seen as inevitable, but a strengths-based philosophy agrees with the old saying that much growth can come from crises. Importantly, and in contrast to a deficit model, a strengths perspective assumes that we cannot know the upper limits of any one person's potential for growth. Every environment is also seen as a "rich oasis of resources" (Rapp & Gorscha, 2012, p. 132), and strengths-based practices position the professional as the connection between these environmental resources and the person accessing assistance. These basic principles of the Strengths Perspective are easily translated into cross-cultural education.

The Susquehanna University Global Opportunities Program is a strengths-based cross-cultural study away graduation requirement for every student. The program is built on a single set of cross-cultural learning goals (Susquehanna University, n.d.), reflecting the core orientations of Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1993), which guide preparatory, experiential, and reflective learning components. There are a variety of ways to complete the experiential part of the program, but in every case, it is book-ended by on-campus coursework.

Options in the cross-cultural experience itself allow students to choose from intentionally designed short faculty-led programs, traditional

semester programs, or self-designed experiences that best suit a student's needs and abilities. These options give a high degree of choice and agency to students. There are no waivers given for this requirement, but these options create endless opportunities to utilize student strengths to accommodate specific needs. Because this is a strengths-based program, and the cross-cultural learning goals are oriented towards growth and intercultural development, staff can assist students in individualizing their work towards the learning goals. For every student, progress is measured primarily through assignments in the on-campus courses before and after the experiential component.

Beyond the learning goals themselves, a strengths approach is tightly woven throughout many aspects the Susquehanna Model. Student advising is focused on helping students determine the best program fit for their own strengths and abilities. Students in preparatory classes complete assignments keyed to uncovering and using their strengths. They also engage in wellness planning that highlights the strategies they already use to maintain their well-being and helps them imagine how they can use their strengths to cope if things go awry.

In the authors' own faculty-led program, we craft assignments that require students to highlight their own strengths and to elaborate specifically on how they will use them as intercultural learners on-site during the program. We also ask them to identify the strengths they will use to benefit the entire group as we travel together. On-site we follow up with them to learn which of their strengths they have relied on most in their cultural exploration, and what, if any, new strengths they have uncovered. Upon return, we help students learn to describe these strengths and lessons-learned in appropriate resume and interview language.

A strengths approach may be most valuable when thinking about support for underrepresented students in study away, both individually and systemically. Individually, students of color, first-generation college students, students with disabilities, and many others will have acquired significant strengths from their own experience that typically go unnoticed but can be applied successfully to study away and cross-cultural experience more generally. Effective coaching can help students make these connections and build their confidence as they consider or prepare for study away. At the same time, a systemic, universal expectation that all students can and will study away, which is the core principle of the Susquehanna Model, is, in and of itself, a strengths-based assertion that all students have strengths that can help them to develop and grow interculturally.

Creating opportunities for all students to engage in cross-cultural education requires the kind of paradigm shift that the Strengths Perspective offers. Simply put, a move away from a deficit model of cross-cultural education means placing an emphasis on capacities, hopes, dreams, and opportunities. A strengths-based philosophy of cross-cultural education assumes that students will grow and benefit from the experience. In fact, developing a strengths-focused cross-cultural educational program means using strengths-based techniques to help any student, but especially those with the most need of assistance, to succeed. In the Susquehanna Model, a strengths-based philosophy is both the reasoning and the means for helping any student access cross-cultural educational opportunities.

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WORKING TOWARDS INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS: A CASE STUDY ON SUPPORTING BLACK AND LATINX UNDERGRADUATE MEN TO STUDY ABROAD

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How can education abroad offices utilize research and partnership to support and center the needs of students from marginalized communities, while critically reflecting on how our policies and practices can contribute to the exclusion that they experience? Over the past year at the University of Maryland-College Park (UMD), we in Education Abroad (EA) and the Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education (OMSE), an office dedicated to the success of racially and ethnically diverse students, began to unpack this question. Through research, we explored the relationship that first-year students in an OMSE program for Black and Latinx men named College Success Scholars (CSS) had with education abroad.

This project evolved out of mutual desire to strengthen EA and OMSE’s relationship. Our partnership began in 2008 with workshops introducing OMSE students to EA. OMSE subsequently included EA as a component of CSS’s Road Map to Success initiative. Over time, we expanded the partnership with satellite EA advising in OMSE, workshops for Scholars and parents, and resource support for student travel expenses. In 2018, staff from EA and OMSE met to discuss our partnership’s future. We realized that while we enhanced access to education abroad, we did not fully understand the needs of

OMSE’s students, nor if EA was addressing them. We eventually landed on this project with CSS first-year students and after receiving approval from UMD’s Institutional Review Board, we began our research.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, we integrated learning theory and critical race theory. Learning and motivational theories posit that students will invest their energies into activities if they expect to gain value

from their involvement. One key element that impacts value expectancy is environment; if a student feels included in their institution, they will more likely get involved and not fear retribution for their participation (Ambrose et al., 2010).

Critical race theory shows us that the learning environments of predominantly white institutions and fields like education abroad historically have not centered the needs of Black and Latinx undergraduate men like the students in CSS, exacerbating systemic inequities that result in limited involvement and/or exclusion from these spaces (Patton, 2016; Willis, 2015; Yosso et al., 2009). Without critical analysis, assumptions like “Black and Latinx men are not interested in education abroad” persist despite research showing that they are highly motivated and interested (McClure et al., 2010; Perdue, 2018; Sweeney, 2013). Our project intended to offer counternarratives that pushed against deficit thinking by recognizing the structural barriers Black and Latinx men faced, while also centering the skills and strength they possessed (Yosso, 2005). We aimed to utilize research in order to cultivate a learning environment where CSS students felt supported and included, and had collective ownership of their engagement with international opportunities.

Methods

A multiracial team consisting of two Black and two white staff from EA and two Black staff from OMSE led the design and implementation of this qualitative study. Four questions guided our work:

1. What are the perceptions that first-year College Success Scholars (CSSs) have about study abroad?
2. What are the roles that family and community play into CSSs’ relationship to education abroad?
3. What are the motivations, if any, that CSSs have for engaging in international educational experiences?
4. What are the needs of CSSs to feel supported, included, and motivated to study abroad?

We designed the research in two phases. The first was a survey that collected CSS demographic data and perceptions of study abroad. The second was audio-recorded focus groups—two with CSS first-year students and one with their parents and guardians. In the next section we provide a summary of initial findings.

Findings

CSS students were highly motivated to study abroad. Focus group participants said that going abroad could support their academic majors and professional aspirations, and most survey respondents indicated “agree” or “strongly agree” when asked to evaluate its benefits. Parents and guardians expressed similar beliefs. We learned that the partnership between OMSE and EA played a key role in these findings. Students reported that their first encounter with education abroad was through our joint activities, and that without it, many were unsure how they would have learned about international opportunities. This was also reflected in the survey. Most respondents answered “agree” or “strongly agree” when asked if they felt supported by the University/Education Abroad to go abroad. These findings revealed that the partnership had positive impact on CSSs’ relationship to education abroad.

In addition to motivations, participants in the study also identified challenges and concerns with going abroad. A prominent concern that appeared in the survey and focus group data was around finances. Students were worried they could not afford education abroad. What was interesting and unexpected was that participants expressed a higher need for training on financial literacy and familiarity with program costs. Parents felt that students did not yet understand budgeting abroad, and others expressed a lack of guidance from EA on how to finance the experience.

Another issue was the inclusion of and safety for Black and Latinx men abroad. Parents and students recognized that racism towards Black and Latinx men existed beyond the borders of the United States and expressed concerns about discrimination. Students discussed their perceptions of education abroad as a majority white space where they did not always see themselves. In response, students named the importance of more representation and the need to see their identities in materials like study abroad marketing or events. One idea that sparked interest was that of cohort programming. Studying abroad in small or large cohorts would better ensure that the Black and Latinx men of CSS would be with others they trusted and with whom they shared experience and/or identity. This would allow opportunities for CSS cohorts to learn and grow together through an international experience.

Students also recognized their own strengths and capacity. In a focus group, one student pointed out that he and his cohort are better able to adapt abroad because as a community they have learned how to navigate racial barriers in the United States. Another student felt study abroad could be an opportunity to be a pioneer; if he were one of the first Black men to study abroad in a certain country, he could foster a pathway for future Black men to do the same. These contributions were a reminder to us that our work with CSS scholars

and families is about fostering an empowering education abroad space where they can thrive.

Conclusion

This research highlighted the critical importance of proactive and structured partnerships for increasing engagement in education abroad for Black and Latinx men at PWIs. It also demonstrated the value of critical listening in the work towards inclusion. Through this study, we are now applying this knowledge in order to design responsive programming. This has included a workshop for OMSE students to advance their financial familiarity with education abroad, exploring cohort programming for CSS, and internal reflections in EA on where we need to strengthen our internal capacity so that we can better support Black and Latinx men.

While this research has fortified EA and OMSE's partnership, there is more to do to support the wider community of Black and Latinx students. As one CSS student noted, "maybe there are other people that are like us and want to [study] abroad, but they don't have the same, they're not getting the same information as we are." This reflection confirms our institution's need to expand our efforts, an expansion that will require us to maintain critical awareness of how identities like race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, ability, national origin, and first-generation student status impact student experience. From this study, we believe that collaborative and relational partnerships are an effective way to move education abroad towards that more inclusive landscape our students deserve.



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CENTERING CULTURE IN INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

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In order to better support student engagement and learning, it is crucial to study and understand the growth processes that we are trying to foster and to assess rigorously our own global education interventions—in other words, to take a good hard look inward. Yet despite the widespread agreement with this notion among international educators and the many efforts to assess our work, very few of the published or presented studies in the field seem to take into serious account the great diversity of our student bodies. Most do not even disaggregate the data by variables like race or socioeconomic class, much less collect data or conduct analyses to actively investigate the degree of access, inclusion, or equity within global learning contexts. Among the few assessment efforts that do look at domestic multicultural variation, the approach often seems to be focusing on underrepresentation or other topics from a deficit perspective. While this lens can be important to addressing systemic inequities, we would argue that it is also critical to consider the assets that students from marginalized groups may bring to their global learning experience.

Agnes Scott College is fortunate to have an unusually diverse student body with no ethnic or racial majority (about a third black, a third white, and a third all other groups), as well as over 40% Pell-eligible students and a significant LGBTQ+ population. Five years ago the college transformed itself to focus on global learning throughout the curriculum and co-curriculum, including a foundational required spring course in the first year, Journeys, within which all students have a week-long faculty-led global immersion experience. Every section of this course, beyond the destination and disciplinary content, covers common topics of globalization, colonialism/imperialism, culture and identity, and the ethics of travel. Students all build on this foundation

with two years of language study and additional coursework that addresses contact, power, and systems that cross or transcend geopolitical boundaries, including one that focuses primarily on relationships among dominant and marginalized cultures, subcultures or groups. This article will share as a case study how we attend to our students' diversity in measuring our success in this context at fostering all our students' intercultural competence.

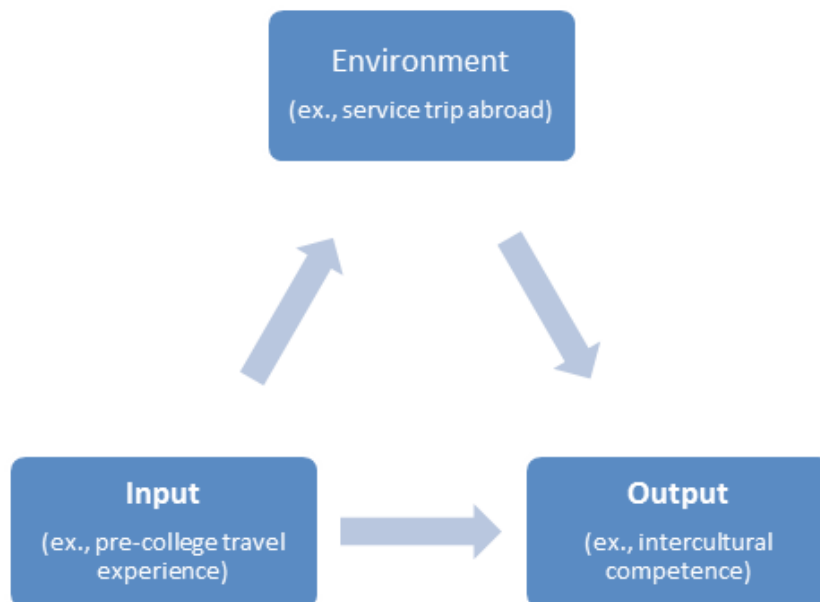
Theoretical Foundation

Our culturally informed, longitudinal approach to intercultural competence development

assessment is informed by two theories: Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989) theory of intersectionality and Alexander Astin’s (1985) Theory of Student Involvement. Intersectionality emerged from critical race theory-informed legal debates on the persistence of discrimination in the justice system. Crenshaw’s theory warned against focusing on issues—such as race or gender—as if they were or ever could exist as isolated considerations. She noted that marginalization often intersects in a layered way that results in more complex experiences of prejudice. For example, in 2018 the

ratio of women’s to men’s median weekly full-time earning is 81.1%. Hispanic women workers have lower median weekly earnings than White, Black, and Asian workers, making only 61.6% of a White man’s median weekly earnings (Institute of Women’s Policy Research, 2019). We seek to continue and expand this conversation about the interconnections between various identities that inform psychological phenomena and functioning. To this end, we employ a strength-based approach to intersectionality.

Alexander Astin’s (1984) Theory of Student Involvement focuses on the developmental processes that occur during a student’s college years. The theory emphasizes the importance of both academic and co-curricular experiences. The theory includes three types of variables: 1) **inputs** or the prior experiences and traits that students have before beginning college (e.g., personality characteristics, prior travel experiences, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status), 2) **environment** or the range of experiences a student has while in college (e.g., foreign language coursework, engagement with culturally diverse social group, study abroad), and 3) **outputs** or the target outcomes institutions hope to instill in their graduates (e.g., intercultural competence, job attainment, cognitive empathy).



Methodological Approach

As a longitudinal research project, the Global Pathways Study (GPS) examines college students’

development holistically. It gathers data on the impact of psychosocial, institutional, and cultural exposure variables. The GPS aims to contribute to the holistic understanding of college students’ intercultural competence in order to identify key

experiences, traits, and behaviors that shape these developments.

Specifically, the GPS captures: 1) students' baseline traits, experiences, and behaviors (e.g., pre-collegiate anxiety/depression, socioeconomic status), 2) institutional variables (e.g., size, region), 3) globally-related college experiences (e.g., study abroad, global coursework), and 4) outcomes variables such as Global Perspectives and self-reported growth. The project responds to a range of research questions and offers rich opportunities for broad and specific research on college student development.

Case Study

All Agnes Scott College incoming students participate in the GPS. The study centers identity, examining independent and dependent variables with a cultural lens. The GPS seeks to illuminate the ways in which students' identity shapes their engagement with and process of developing global awareness and intercultural competence. The project aims to contribute the field and literature and translate to actionable, applied outcomes. The GPS has found nuanced differences in outcomes based on identity variables (i.e., some differences in response patterns on intercultural competence measures based on the race of respondent), in a way that has informed our institutional approach as educators, program developers, and advisors.

Students complete an initial baseline in the summer before arriving on campus. They then complete a follow-up survey each spring and again one and five years post-graduation to assess the long-term trajectory of outcomes fostered during the college years. While the higher education environment often precludes randomization and

many controls, this longitudinal methodology allows for some predictive and causal interpretations. We also can disaggregate larger group-level findings and examine outcomes at the class-, cohort-, or entire-college level.

Applications and Conclusion

Although we are still early in the analyses of the four-year change data, we are beginning to not only apply our results for our own program improvement to benefit all of our students, but also to interrogate the inclusivity and positionality of the existing measures and intercultural assessment tools. Preliminary data suggests that at least some of the items and/or their scoring may implicitly assume majority group status of respondents engaging with out-group cultures and that the intercultural skills and experiences of students from diverse cultural, language, and socioeconomic communities may require more nuanced interpretations. For example, while an item might interpret increased trust of those who are different as growth, for a black male college student a healthy increase in intercultural competence and awareness might actually involve a realistic assessment of threat that leads to a decrease in trust instead.

For inclusive research that evaluates the efficacy and impact of education abroad experiences, we need to not only acknowledge but also center the role of respondents' intersectional identities, including as potential strengths. Only then will we as a field of international education be leveraging the potential of intercultural competence development assessment to supporting all of our students' engagement.

MENTOR AND SELF-EFFICACY APPROACHES TO ENCOURAGE DIVERSE STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN GILMAN

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Getting students to take a chance is often an uphill climb, and this is especially true for students studying abroad. The U.S. Department of State's Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, started in 2001, was created as a scholarship focusing on students of "limited financial means...historically underrepresented in education abroad" (gilmanscholarship.org, para. 1). Opportunities for underserved students exist when mentoring and self-efficacy approaches are used to increase student success. Our experiences at Jefferson State Community College promoting the Gilman demonstrated that a collaborative, intergenerational strengths-based approach for outreach and mentoring of students can produce significant success. Encouraging diverse populations that their application efforts today can be rewarded with future success requires a consistent and focused effort. With this effort what may seem to other educators as a high-risk venture can be transformed into opportunity, hope, and favorable results.

A strengths-based approach concerns itself chiefly with a "resilient mindset" (Jones-Smith, 2011, p. 44) that develops between faculty and staff educators and between those educators and the underrepresented students supported. An integrative, collaborative approach does not leave the student without a voice or decision-making authority. Throughout the outreach, advising, and mentoring processes, the student must be cultivated as the star of the scholarship application process. The evolving integrative, strengths-based approach promotes and encourages faculty, staff, and students to respect the elements of personality, character traits, and historical circumstances that each person brings to the collaborative process. Duncan and Hubble (2000) argue that the client

(or our community college student) should be given directorial control of the action as it unfolds. For example, when faculty and staff designed relevant critical thinking activities, students must become direct participants and co-producers learning how to evaluate, make meaningful choices, and process the necessary information required for successful applications. They use worksheets and tools to develop their material but have access to assistance from the supporting faculty and staff.

The educators who provide this supportive mentoring believe that students are worthy of success. They also believe that high financial need, minority, and first-generation college students have the capability and grit necessary

to achieve success. The goal for faculty and staff focused on providing the additional time and positive encouragement needed to motivate students towards self-efficacy, striving to break the dependency cycle. From a holistic wellness perspective, advisors and mentors must incorporate diverse information and activities aimed at increasing and enhancing the capability of under-represented students while fostering a respectful relationship with students. Working in a reciprocal, symbiotic, and collaborative way promotes the opportunity for minority students to become co-producers of supportive services rather than solely dependent consumers of those services. Morgan (2014) argued that contemporary thought and practice focuses on fixing a problem or fixing a student in the case of higher education, which is a deficit approach, seeing weaknesses and disparities. The asset model provides an alternative perspective by focusing on the talents and strengths of the individual.

We observed that as students developed and refined their two essays for the Gilman, they gained research skills about the study abroad country, its geography, history, cultural values, and overall environment. The community service of students after returning from study abroad served as a light of hope to other interested students from similar backgrounds. While the student winners of the scholarships bring distinction to themselves, their wins also bring recognition to the community college as an institution. Working together for the mutual benefit of the student and the institution is necessary for success and the potential for increasing social capital and resilience while reducing feelings of doubt and disenfranchisement.

The process of encouraging diverse students to apply for the Gilman reflects the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), which encompasses an emotional and psychological belief in the individual's ability to succeed in conjunction with having a goal-oriented success plan. Bandura's research on a "unifying theory of behavioral change" can adapt to how competitive award opportunities with supportive mentoring and advising can be a catalyst for transformational change. This type of metamorphosis, using mentor and self-efficacy approaches to encourage diverse student participation, is valuable not only for the Gilman but for other scholarships and internship opportunities.

How we go about doing what we do as educators is what makes the difference. When educators genuinely believe in the inherent dignity and worth of a student regardless of socio-economic background, ethnicity, or academic standing, then a positive change occurs. A willingness to give extra time and encouragement to students while urging them to apply for academic opportunities can make a significant impact on their motivation. Following up with the students to encourage and help as needed has shown to have a considerable impact on their level of confidence and willingness to go through the process. During these times, students were provided with a realistic time frame allowing for review and rewrites and were given templates with prompts that guided them in the essay writing process.

Adapted from wellness guidelines of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS.gov), we established a method for helping our students and added the spiritual component from health programs. This adaptation established the *Nine Dimensions of Mentor and Self-Efficacy Approaches to Encourage Diverse Student Participation in Gilman*:

- 1. Physical:** Identifying and explaining tasks to be completed within the time available. Discussing and having students research potential health and safety dangers and how to prepare for, overcome, and communicate this information to concerned family members.
- 2. Emotional:** To promote and encourage student self-efficacy through advocating that the student must believe in their own ability to succeed, along with designing and implementing a plan that is SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely).
- 3. Creative:** To identify and prepare diverse ways to inform the community upon return.
- 4. Environmental:** Researching the geography, history, and culture of the study abroad country.
- 5. Financial:** Open and upfront planning for the costs that are not covered by the scholarship, such as passport application and immunizations, as well as deposits for airline and educational fees.
- 6. Occupational:** Benefits of study abroad to their future occupational interests.
- 7. Intellectual:** Strategies for writing two persuasive scholarship essays using question prompt blocks and self-check essay rubrics.
- 8. Social:** Discussing group homestays and cultural trips in the study abroad country.
- 9. Spiritual:** Researching the values and cultural norms of the study abroad country regarding family life, personal space, religious beliefs, social status, and approaches to problem solving.

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019; Falcone, 2019)

Focusing on the strengths-based, asset-model approach concentrates on the inherent robustness of individuals and invigorates all to strive to overcome powerlessness and disadvantage, thus spurring vitality, fortitude, tenacity, and empowerment. This approach produced a 56% success rate for the Gilman Scholarship applicants for our students. A collaborative process between the student, faculty, staff, and community members has generated success that we believe can be duplicated by others in community colleges who will also be able to produce a pool of students empowered in their goal to pursue not only the Gilman but other scholarship and internship opportunities.

SPEAKING FOR THEMSELVES: STUDENT SELF-AUTHORSHIP IN EDUCATION ABROAD

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As institutions and the field of study abroad evolve beyond merely achieving representational diversity towards inclusive excellence, how can the unique strengths, skills, learning goals, and identities of diverse participants be effectively supported across a spectrum of difference? Many traditional support mechanisms and strategies in study abroad are still based on decades of catering to majority participants; they unintentionally create boundaries of external expectations and assumptions that may not apply (or may be detrimental) to diverse populations. We advocate that by reorienting key support structures through a framework of self-authorship, diverse students can voice their own unique needs and strengths throughout their study abroad experience.

Self-authorship has been applied as an overarching developmental process (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Kegan, 1994) and in the achievement of intercultural maturity (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005), but its theoretical thrust focuses on moving from external to internal self-definition. We evoke the theory of self-authorship and apply it in our work at The Institute for Study Abroad (IFSA) as a series of strengths-based strategies to elevate the internal voice of students in exploring their identities, learning objectives, and experiences through four key areas of the study abroad process: appreciative advising, individualized learning plans, mentorship check-ins, and student storytelling.

Appreciative Advising

In order to deploy a strengths-based advising strategy that allows opportunities to discover

individual student motivations, IFSA adopted the appreciative advising model (Bloom & Hudson, 2008) in 2014. Based on appreciative inquiry and positive psychology, appreciative advising techniques led IFSA to reframe the way we engage with students throughout the study abroad lifecycle spanning recruitment at study abroad fairs, advising pre-departure, modifying onsite support in appropriate ways, and returnee programming.

Adopting a model that supports the individualized learning needs of each student also enriched the ways in which we deepen our organizational commitment to inclusive excellence. For example, our program advisors hold Appreciative Advising phone calls with applicants during the pre-departure phase of study abroad where they may ask students questions such as, “How might navigating your social identities be different in a new culture while you are abroad?” This line of

open-ended questioning allows students to drive the conversation, leads to more profound, personal connections than were previously possible, and helps advance their thinking in preparation for a successful experience abroad. Through this orientation, IFSA learns more about the individual and can subsequently offer more nuanced resources in preparation for an experience abroad.

Individualized Learning Plans

Appreciative advising becomes a crucial connection for students to self-articulate values, goals, and motivations that are important to them, but translating those ideas to action happens with individualized learning plans. Goal-setting exercises prior to study abroad are well-established in practice, but individualized learning plans underscore that ownership of learning and experience falls squarely into the hands of the students themselves. Rather than only relying on traditional learning metrics such as language gains or academic performance, skillful encouragement for students to explore additional values is paramount. For Keith, a first-generation college student who was the first person in his hometown to leave the United States, gaining confidence in booking travel, budgeting, and navigating foreign currencies was as important as making gains in the target host language. For Meili, a heritage-seeking Chinese American student in Shanghai, understanding her own intersectional identities as both Chinese and American was far more important to her personally than any single academic course. Without minimizing traditional goals that may include academic performance, language acquisition, or intercultural competency development, individualized learning plans explicitly include (and draw out) personalized goals to be articulated and measured according to a student's own internal values and needs.

Mentorship Check-Ins

Intercultural mentorship has been a noted feature of effective study abroad practices (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2012), but our model of mentorship utilizes individualized learning plans to support capacities of self-authorship. Intercultural mentorship helps students to recognize their own constructions of meaning (and thus, the possibility of other valid constructions) embedded in culture; a strengths-oriented view of mentorship in support of self-authorship can further encourage students to negotiate their own beliefs, identities, and motivations, and social relations.

Rather than pruning individualized learning plans that deviate from externally dictated learning outcomes, honoring the interpersonal and intrapersonal goals of students through critical reflection and guidance is crucial. Katrina, a Ugandan black woman studying in Shanghai as a U.S. international student, expressed an early interest in understanding Sino-African relations and the differences of a racialized experience in the United States compared to China. This was not a learning outcome that that would have been externally named (or even predicted) by IFSA. However, through her individualized learning plan that named this goal and mentorship check-ins that allowed her to overtly engage in discussions, debriefs, and encouragement to continue seeking insights, this facet of her sojourn was a layered revelation of her own identity and insight into navigating complex social and political realities. Although she was still encouraged to embrace and connect this learning with her other academic studies, a broader view of mentorship encouraged her to chart her own paths in learning and validated their importance.

Student Storytelling

Finally, student storytelling can be a powerful mechanism for fostering self-authorship in the individual study abroad sojourn, whether telling one's own story or reading about the journey of another. *Unpacked: A Study Abroad Guide for Students Like Me* (Institute for Study Abroad, 2020) is a student-driven resource with a unique focus on the powerful stories of students who are often marginalized in study abroad participation. By featuring sections dedicated to a wide range of lived social identities, this digital resource creates new narratives on diversity and inclusion in global education. Student writers “unpack” some of their most complicated, deeply personal, and lasting reflections, creating a new normal in study abroad while inspiring others to navigate their own unique journeys.

From the aching trepidation of a first-generation college student abroad (Sanchez, 2019), to the new center of racial gravity for a black woman in Europe (Walker, 2019), to a five-part special mobility series about exploring the world from a seated position (Lee, 2016), peer modeling through student storytelling is a powerful illustration of self-authorship in education abroad. It is a living narrative of students discovering their own internal voices. Combined with other techniques of student support delivered by education abroad professionals, student narratives underscore the most fundamental notions of self-authorship in education abroad.



Conclusion

In reflecting on her own racial identity abroad Francesca Walker (2019) shared that she “became more cognizant of the myriad of experiences black people have around the world, and also more proud of the richness of my own heritage.” Francesca’s experience is a singular but profound example of the learning that can, and should, be cultivated for diverse students abroad. As international educators supporting diverse students in the field, it is imperative that we build mechanisms of self-authorship to tell us what students seek and need and to help each student realize their potential. Rather than speculate these needs, learner-centered approaches such as appreciative advising, individualized learning plans, mentor check-ins, and student storytelling orient the power of success to participants themselves.

A wholly individualized approach may seem counterintuitive, but it rightly places value on intentional, equity-driven practice. Rather than scripting experiences from historic, majority-focused norms or anticipating needs in deficit-based assumptions, helping students self-identity what they need and what outcomes they seek fosters self-authorship in the students we serve.



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FROM THE PLAYING FIELD TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIPS: A STRENGTHS-BASED ADVISING CASE STUDY

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The rapidly evolving dynamics in the field of international education present new opportunities for rethinking how international educators approach engaging with our students as well as how we position them for success before, during, and after their international experiences. In her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Gay (2018) argues that educators must interact “to and through their [students’] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” (p. 32). Strengths-based advising constitutes one of the culturally responsive tools that we, as international educators, can harness to support underrepresented students.

With the increase of underrepresented students in international education, the strengths-based paradigm is particularly compelling. Scholar-practitioner Schreiner (2013) writes that “strengths-based advising represents a paradigm shift for higher education from failure prevention and a survival mentality to success promotion and a perspective of thriving” (p. 105). This paradigm shift in advising also necessitates a paradigm shift for personalized education with an accompanying significant increase in resources, namely personnel. This would make the scalability of this one-on-one, time-intensive model feasible, and it would constitute a true investment not only in supporting our underrepresented students but also in an authentic cultural shift in higher education.

A crucial point of departure of strengths-based advising is valuing our students’ lived experiences, skills, and talents. This empowers us to ground our approach within the context of our students’ intersectional identities. For example, the lack of international experience is but one facet of a First-Time Traveler’s identity. Numerous sources illustrate how being a first-time traveler is correlated to being a first-gen student, receiving a Pell Grant, and having parents/guardians with limited travel experience (Open Doors). International educators must be mindful of multiple and potentially overlapping identity domains as well as the myriad ways in which they intersect. Our students’ intersectional identities offer opportunities and indeed constitute strengths in terms of “ways of processing information, interacting with people, perceiving the world, and navigating the environment” (Schreiner, 2013, p.107).

The five steps outlined in Schreiner's strengths-based advising paradigm are: Identifying, Affirming, Envisioning, Planning, and Applying.

1. To identify the student's strengths, the advisor builds a positive relationship with the student by exploring the student's background, prior learning experiences, and successes. Guiding questions that advisors might pose to their advisees include 'the disciplines that they have learned with the greatest ease' or 'what they are like at their best.'

2. Affirming the student's strengths centers on increasing the student's own awareness for the skills and abilities they possess. It is important to emphasize that talent identification is a point of departure and not the end goal. The challenge for advisors is to frame the student's strengths not as intrinsic abilities but rather areas for development.

3. In envisioning a future, the advisor and student discuss aspirations and articulate the nexus between their strengths and their future goals. Guiding questions in this step should be framed as personal development; e.g., 'how would you describe the person that you would like to become' rather than in terms of career aspirations.

4. The planning phase involves setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) goals and identifying people and resources needed to achieve the goals.

5. The final phase of the advising model is the **application** of the student's strengths to the situations and challenges they may face.

The strengths-based model positions international educators to engage our students in their own learning, within the context of their international experience. What follows is a case study of how the strengths-based advising model was successfully used to holistically empower an underrepresented student to study abroad in South Africa.

When Melvin, a first-abroad, African American male student-athlete, was presented with

the opportunity to study abroad in South Africa, he did not yet recognize the value of leaving his hometown, let alone in partaking in an international experience. Melvin's advisor recognized that while examining the commonalities between South Africa and the US did spark his interest, he was content to study them from afar. The advisor continued to nurture their relationship. As conversations progressed, she positioned him to identify his strengths, most notably his motivation to learn, his thoughtful awareness, and his leadership skills.

Affirming his strengths led him to appreciate his own potential, and concomitantly, he became increasingly open to new opportunities to develop his strengths through co-curricular activities. As trust in their relationship deepened, conversations evolved to center on future aspirations. Using the Socratic method, Melvin's advisor prompted him to grapple with big-picture questions around his identities, his strengths, and his aspirations. How has he been shaped by his parents' educational attainment, his socioeconomic status, his race, and his status as a student-athlete? How could his strengths—his motivation to learn, his thoughtful awareness, and his leadership skills—help him to reach his goals? Through these iterative processes of conversations and questioning, Melvin came into a deep-rooted appreciation for how the new experience of studying abroad could push him out of his comfort zone, deepen his knowledge, and challenge his worldview. Envisioning the type of person that he aspired to become, Melvin hesitantly decided to take the leap to interact with the world in ways that he previously simply hadn't considered.

In subsequent meetings, Melvin's advisor challenged him to translate his new vision for his future into tangible, specific goals, namely developing his personal leadership capacity and expanding his motivation to learn through faculty relationships. Part of the South Africa experience entailed the students meeting up

with a group of faculty members in Cape Town, visiting universities, sharing meals together, and reflecting on their experiences. Melvin was able to have informal conversations with one professor in particular, and they bonded over their shared experiences. They both felt like they both were just discovering something. Somehow this made the experience less scary for Melvin, and he was able to see the faculty member in a new light.

Upon Melvin's return to the US, his advisor worked with him to build on his international experience to the end of deepening his motivation to learn and his leadership skills in the dual contexts of academics and extracurricular activities. For example, she encouraged him to enroll in an independent study on South African protest literature in conjunction with the faculty member with whom he had bonded abroad. Through this intentional, exploratory process of strengths-based advising, Melvin was able to link how firsthand experiences in South Africa could pave the way for his personal leadership development. In the words of Melvin's advisor, "[f]or this particular student, they needed to see the beauty in their adventurous mind and in their willingness to learn and to expand their knowledge...their motivation was their strength."

Underrepresented students face challenges in internationalizing their education. These challenges constitute opportunities for international educators to reflect on our engagement with underrepresented students as well as the different advising models that we employ to position them for success. The strengths-based advising model is diametrically opposed to a deficit approach in education in that it challenges educators to develop relationships with our students, to work together to uncover and to affirm their strengths, to reflect on and to articulate specific goals, and finally, to contextualize their personal growth within, in this case, their international experience. For

international educators who are seeking out innovative ways to empower underrepresented students and position them to harness their international experience as a launchpad to navigate their self-growth, this case study illustrates the strengths-based advising model's potential.

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RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: LEVERAGING MINORITIZED STUDY ABROAD STUDENT STRENGTHS

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Over the last eight years, we have conducted a series of research projects with education abroad students from a Hispanic-Serving Institution. The majority, though not all research participants, are first-generation college students of Latinx descent. Many participated in two- to six-week faculty-led programs in Costa Rica (24) or Thailand (9), others in longer-term programs worldwide (89). Despite these differences, we noticed several commonalities. Namely, minoritized-student assets informed their motivations, supported their success abroad, and were amplified by their international experiences.

The theme of this issue of Global Impact Exchange, “strengths-based approaches to supporting students,” compelled us to re-examine our data from these varied projects with two questions in mind:

- What roles do strengths play in the education abroad experiences of minoritized students?
- How can we support minoritized students and help them leverage and build upon those strengths?

Although we have shared some of this research (Wick et al., 2019; Willis, Wick, Bykowski et al., 2019; Willis, Wick, Han et al., 2019), we have not previously examined how minoritized student strengths function before, during, and after education abroad. By using an assets-based approach, and Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural

Wealth (CCW) model, we see how students employ and increase assets before, during, and after learning abroad. Yosso’s model describes six forms of wealth: a) aspirational, b) linguistic, c) familial, d) social, e) navigational, and f) resistant.

Strengths-Based Motivations

Our research highlighted varying ways student assets motivate participation in education abroad programs. For example, the following excerpt demonstrates how cultural background (familial capital) and desire to confront systemic injustice (aspirational and resistant capital) inspired participation.

[As a child of Mexican immigrants] I want

to see where I can try to fix the system... Yeah I do really want to integrate that part of resources that I draw from my study abroad and bring it into Mexico and in a sense here [in the US] as well. (Pre-departure interview)

Aspirational capital was also influential as students indicated that making progress toward graduation was essential to their participation. Learning about student assets can inform program design to respond to and support minoritized student strengths-related motivations.

Leveraging Strengths Abroad

Minoritized students use their strengths to facilitate success abroad. While in Costa Rica, students used their linguistic and familial capital to connect with their host families, professional peers, and locals (Wick et al., 2019). Students recognized that they shared similar values, norms, and communication styles in ways that allowed them to better discern differences between Latin American cultures. For example, in an interview one participant explained that they understood their Costa Rican homestay mother's religious behavior thanks to their Mexican ethnic background and upbringing in a religious household.

Students also employed resistant and aspirational capital to navigate difficult situations abroad. Although students were aware of their disenfranchisement in the US, while abroad they saw their situations differently when confronted with the social and economic contexts of their host communities. Elizabeth's comments bring this idea to life.

Even by the staff that we worked with, they thought that we were spoiled, rich, with money. We're none of that [laughs]. We really had to paint a picture, "We grew up in communities such as this one..." Yes, we have this opportunity, but it doesn't mean that I will

have this opportunity later on. (Post-program focus group)

We found that cultural wealth also prepared students to contribute meaningfully to their community engagement work, whether abroad or once they were home (Wick et al., 2019; Willis, Wick, Bykowski et al., 2019). Thanks to their aspirational and resistant capital, students and hosts alike gained more from the experience.

Increased Strengths

Our research suggests that minoritized students derive powerful benefits from their education abroad experiences that allow them to further leverage their strengths. Even as racial and ethnic identities played a role in motivation and ability to engage, for minoritized students, these identities were also sites of growth. As one participant stated:

I would just always say I am Mexican, we are very traditional, and culturally I am very identified with my Mexican culture. [Participating in the class and study] has opened my mind a little bit more about how it is more complex than I ever really thought about it. (Post-program interview)

Cases like these suggested that participants were becoming more aware of both the strengths and the privileges that came with their identities.

From this awareness many participants spoke of how their experiences affirmed their resistance to oppressive societal structures. In our post-program interviews and focus groups we noted that participants strengthened their previous convictions and moved into action in ways that aligned with their professional goals and competencies (Willis, Wick, Bykowski et al., 2019; Willis, Wick, Han et al., 2019). For example, after returning home from participating in a reality tour examining human trafficking in Thailand, one

student led their travel peers to become involved in two fundraising and awareness raising events through online activism and promotion.

“[With my activist work] my main goal is to spread the word. When we were in Thailand, [our local expert guide] was saying, it’s not always great just to give money, but it’s better to spread awareness and educate them. . . . That really stuck with me.” (Post-program interview)

The “increased sense of empowerment and resistance” (Willis et al., 2019, p. 78) that we noted suggests that the experiences abroad had a powerful impact on future goals.

Recommendations

In order to increase access and success, education abroad programs must be designed to reward, leverage, and build upon student assets. For example, explicitly connecting program benefits to students’ asset-based motivations can be more effective than current approaches that ignore the global competence these students bring (Doerr, 2018). Additionally, academic, career, and community service connections must be central to program design and forefronted in outreach. During the application and preparation processes we must recognize and reward student strengths such as linguistic, familial, and aspirational capital by facilitating the identity exploration and development process.

To support strengths-based skill building, we should refine the education abroad experience. Changes could include one-on-one and group conversations about experiences negotiating intersecting identities throughout the education abroad experience. We are now integrating these approaches into our program designs so that all participants have opportunities to verbally process in one-on-one and group settings throughout the

process. We also noticed that participation in the research process itself (such as interviews and focus groups) appeared to contribute to increases in student assets. The structured opportunities to pause and critically reflect upon their experiences at multiple points in time provided impetus which seemed to deepen students’ thinking and feelings about their experiences, helping them to make more meaning and grow from the process.

Finally, as students continually demonstrated the use of and referral to aspirational and resistant capital, it is strategic to leverage education abroad as an opportunity to examine privilege and power in the US and around the world. Through these myriad means, it is possible we can guide and empower students to develop action plans to promote positive social change grounded in their pre-existing and emerging assets. As such, we can pursue social justice both for and from within the minoritized communities we aim to serve.

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AN EQUITY-MINDED APPROACH TO RESEARCHING, WRITING, AND PUBLISHING TO AMPLIFY STUDENT STRENGTHS

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Deficit thinking impacts the content that is published about and by marginalized students, practitioners, and scholars (Contreras, Lopez-McGee, Wick, & Willis, 2020; Taylor, Angelique, & Kyle, 2010). The act of publishing, especially in peer-reviewed publications, is an impenetrable process. We acknowledge that exclusionary publishing practices disproportionately impact minoritized students and scholars, and we note that some are responding to these barriers. For example, many of us had explored these practices while serving on a 2019 Diversity Abroad (DA) task force on research and scholarship. Also, when some of us were presented with the opportunity to work as collective editors of the January 2020 special issue of *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (Contreras et al., 2020), we sought to build equity into the process and product of our editorial work and embody the issue’s theme through our process. We designed our approach in opposition to past experiences as authors and editors and aligned with DA task force recommendations. We felt that adopting an equity mindset (Bensimon, 2007) could provide space for all practitioners to create opportunities for minoritized students to become authors, and together with our students to conduct research and write about minoritized students from an assets-based perspective.

This article serves to demystify the process of publication and to encourage practitioners and scholars to challenge systemic exclusion of minoritized voices by adopting four equity-minded practices: centering work on assets

instead of deficits, including student voices, intentionally reaching authors, and humanizing the publication process. Before looking into the four equity-minded practices, we would like to share how a student might become a scholar-

practitioner or publisher. Our team recognizes that the path to publication is not always a clear one (De Wit, Altbach, & Leask, 2018). Even for us, the opportunity to edit the special edition of *Frontiers* was offered because one of us spoke up about equity and inclusion, was available for extra work, and included others in the process. We believe that each of us can engage with the publication pipeline by adopting an equity mindset.

We hope that this discussion of four equity-minded practices will inspire Global Impact Exchange readers to research, write, and reshape the academic publication pipeline in ways that amplify and celebrate the assets of minoritized students and professionals in international education and contribute to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the field.

I. Centering Research and Scholarship on Assets

The first practice that we propose for challenging systemic barriers to inclusion is centering research and writing on minoritized student assets, instead of deficits. To implement this approach we propose focusing on areas of inquiry that amplify and center the voices of minoritized students and their experiences. These approaches were integrated throughout the DA task force recommendations. The Call for Articles (2019) from the *Frontiers* special issue also provides an example of explicitly encouraging research and writing that explores minoritized student strengths and experiences rather than deficits or barriers.

II. Including Student Voices and Priming the Pump

The second equity-minded practice we suggest for challenging systematic barriers to inclusion is to emphasize student voices. Intentionally including minoritized students in longer-term traditional research projects, mentoring, presenting, and writing can yield meaningful results.

Supporting relationships between graduate and undergraduate students can bolster collaboration skills and confidence. Professionals can also support minoritized students in co-presenting at conferences as well as in co-authoring. For the [Special Issue on Equity and Inclusion](#) for *Frontiers*, we invited three minoritized students from our various campuses to write book reviews as a way to engage their voices and provide them with opportunities for immediate publication. These short pieces did not require a lengthy research process and provided a pathway to publication for undergraduate and graduate students. Sharing opportunities for participation prepares minoritized students to publish in the future and demystifies the submission process. This kind of exposure also strengthens their social capital, curriculum vitae, confidence, and interest in postgraduate education.

III. Intentional Outreach to New Researchers and Writers

As another means of rejecting deficit thinking and embodying an equity-minded approach to publishing, we propose intentional outreach to new voices. Amplifying new voices in research and writing can be achieved in different ways, but making an outreach plan to include new voices should be a deliberate part of the process. At a bare minimum, soliciting opportunities for research and calls for papers on the largest platforms, listservs, and message boards such as [SECUSS-L](#) or [NAFSA Network](#) is not enough. It is important to reach out individually to communities of students, practitioners, and scholars who may not be included in the lists or who may not yet see themselves as authors. Mining the field for recently produced dissertations from a wide array of institutional types is just one way to find new voices through formal search engines (e.g., [ProQuest](#)) and informal networks (e.g., colleagues, mentees, former students). Another endeavor to include new voices is to challenge

how the academy privileges the academic work of R1 institutions and highly ranked universities by intentionally contacting potential new authors.

IV. Humanizing Through Support and Guidance

The final practice we advocate is to humanize the publication process. While collaborating we noted that our experiences with editors and publishers tended to be anonymous and dehumanizing. Given the opacity of the normative publication process, we decided to prioritize support for authors in our call for proposals by offering access to editorial feedback in advance of receiving formal article submissions (Call for articles, 2019) and throughout the revision process. Through our correspondence we communicated how well submissions aligned with Special Issue goals and guided prospective authors to emphasize research-informed approaches to asset-based student support strategies that would guide education abroad professionals in their practice. We recommend that authors and editors with an equity-minded approach integrate support throughout the editorial process because of the dividends not only for the protégé and mentee but also for the field. We also recognize that the additional work with prospective authors may require more flexible timelines both for the sake of the editors undertaking this work and for the authors themselves.

Recommendations and Next Steps

With this article for practitioners, authors, editors, and publishers we demystified the process of publication and outlined four equity-minded practices that challenge systemic barriers: centering research on assets, including student voices, intentionally reaching new partners, and humanizing the publication experience. We seek to inspire readers to reshape the academic publication

pipeline in ways that amplify and celebrate the assets of minoritized education abroad students. We hope that by sharing these practices, scholars and practitioners will recognize how they can publish assets-based work and create opportunities for students to publish and share their stories. We are eager to partner with scholars and practitioners who seek to integrate equity-minded approaches in their research, writing, and publishing. Please reach out to us.

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DIVERSITY ABROAD MEMBERSHIP

*Where Diversity, Inclusion &
Global Education Intersect*

Diversity Abroad is the leading membership organization that inspires and supports educators, policy makers, industry professionals, and other stakeholders in connecting internationalization efforts with diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Our consortium's shared overall goal is to ensure that all students—domestic and international—have equitable access to the benefits of global learning, a high impact practice—and are able to leverage such educational opportunities to thrive academically, personally and professionally.

JOIN TODAY!



WHY MEMBERSHIP?

Membership with Diversity Abroad is available to Institutions/Organizations and Individuals. Join today to leverage these benefits in the following areas:

- ◆ **Career Advancement & Belonging for Global Educators** - Ensuring global educators from diverse backgrounds are represented, equipped to advance their careers and experience a sense of belonging in their workplaces.
- ◆ **Education Abroad** - Ensuring students are equipped to succeed in education abroad programs requires staff, faculty, and administrators to promote inclusive practices across the continuum of the education abroad process.
- ◆ **International Student Services & Cultural Exchange** - Facilitating meaningful global exchanges across the full range of diverse perspectives represented on our campuses in the US and abroad.
- ◆ **Global Engagement at Home** - Exploring digital learning tools & meaningful global educational experiences at home - both on campus and within the local community.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Membership fees range from \$299 to \$3,645.

CONTACT US

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