



## AIEA ISSUE BRIEF

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### **Training the Trainers: Preparing Faculty to Become Better Mentors of Intercultural Competence**

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## INTRODUCTION

Many institutions have goals for students to develop knowledge and skills to engage in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Different objectives may fall under this rubric, but one of particular importance is intercultural competence, generally described as the attitudes, knowledge, and skills one needs to be successful when engaging across with difference, resulting in “communication and behavior that are both effective and appropriate” (Deardorff, 2017).

Sending students abroad is one way of helping students become more interculturally competent, however research shows that interventions and guidance alongside their international experiences are often needed for students to have the greatest gains in these areas (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Bennett, 2009; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Hunter, 2008).

As short-term, faculty-led programs grow in popularity, it is more essential than ever that faculty leaders are given the support and guidance needed to provide such interventions and guidance to students. This issue brief provides resources for training and developing faculty’s own intercultural understanding as well as their skills and abilities for mentoring students through the process.

## 1. Complementing Disciplinary Learning

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As institutions articulate and define goals for campus internationalization and global citizenship, SIOs recognize the need to identify global learning outcomes and design impactful programming for students. Yet, without the involvement of faculty, who are often taking students abroad and directly interacting with students' intercultural experiences, there is a much lower chance of reaching those goals. To successfully integrate faculty into the process requires overcoming certain barriers. Faculty may be unaware of the need for intercultural competence, lack interest or skills in fostering students' intercultural competence, or even be resistant to focusing on intercultural competence.

A starting point is to bring awareness of the importance of intercultural competence, while tying this concept to the goals faculty outline for student learning. The desire to teach abroad is generally driven by a desire to expose students to components of their discipline first-hand, i.e., to introduce students to sites of importance, guest lecturers, new, creative, or different applications of their discipline, and/or environmental or contextual aspects that influence the discipline. Often, along with these discipline specific goals, is the desire to compare and contrast cultural differences and perhaps to develop cultural awareness.

What some faculty may not consider is that this first-hand engagement and critical thinking about culture does not come automatically. In fact, experiencing differences between cultures can be detrimental to some students' learning. Imagine, for example, a faculty member taking students outside for class on a beautiful day. They all happily acquiesce, until one realizes the grass makes her sneeze, another realizes the sun is too bright and he does not have sunglasses, and a third is distracted by kids playing Frisbee. Suddenly, the faculty member cannot make progress teaching the content, because he or she did not address the environment. The same thing occurs when taking students abroad. Helping students adapt to the new culture to experience the disciplinary content means focusing at least minimally on intercultural competence.

## 2. Developing New Pedagogical Approaches

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For many faculty (as well as the SIOs and units supporting study abroad there is an explicit expectation that the program will deepen students' understanding of cultural differences and increase their intercultural competence); thus, students should do more than simply tolerate a new environment. But for this to occur, faculty must identify intercultural learning outcomes for their programs and

provide structure for their students to practice and develop these skills, while also coping with the differences inherent in teaching outside the traditional classroom. All of these are established in the discipline of intercultural competence, and faculty development could be supported in the following ways:

- **Identifying intercultural learning outcomes:** provide resources explaining skillsets and attitudes of intercultural competence and example learning goals.
- **Developing curricular structure:** provide resources and approaches for teaching, including foundational content, activities and exercises to apply learning, and rubrics for offering feedback.
- **Fostering site-based teaching:** provide resources for facilitating experiential learning, including ways to encourage students to learn from local people and how to facilitate debriefs and discussions.

Therefore, faculty mentoring of students' intercultural learning necessitates both an understanding of the discipline AND an appreciation for the different approach learning takes in a study abroad setting. Facilitating students' development of intercultural competence may come easily to some faculty, but most of us can further our understanding and approaches from additional training and development. To assist, there are a number of outstanding resources and models which can increase the likelihood of student development of intercultural competence. The following resources may resonate with faculty in framing intercultural competence and providing applications:

### 3. Primers: Theory and Background

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For those interested in understanding the foundations of intercultural competence, books covering theory and research are an important resource. Building a resource library might include:

**Learning Across Cultures: Locally and Globally**, edited by Barbara Kappler Mikk and Inge Ellen Steglitz (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2017), is a useful guide to understanding intercultural learning, combining perspectives from education, history, anthropology, and communication on learning across cultures.

**The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence**, edited by Darla K. Deardorff (2009) provides an overview of the theories and research on intercultural competence from leading experts and scholars from around the world.



**Student Learning Abroad: What Our Students Are Learning, What They're Not, and What We Can Do About It**, edited by Michael Vande Berg, R. Michael Paige, and Kris Hemming Lou (2012), reviews the dominant paradigms of study abroad, provoking readers to reconsider long-held assumptions about teaching and learning in study abroad and to reexamine the design and delivery of their programs.

#### 4. Deep Dive: Developing Expertise

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A larger financial and time commitment can lead to significant knowledge and expertise of intercultural competence. An effective approach may be to invest in an individual who can take the lead on supporting faculty and program leaders on your campus, or by providing mechanisms for a rotation of faculty to delve deeply into this field.

**Intercultural Communication Institute**, <https://intercultural.org/> (ICI) provides workshops, seminars, and training for educators to foster awareness and appreciation of cultural difference in both international and domestic arenas. The ICI runs Institutes for Intercultural Communication in the summer (SIIC), winter (WIIC) and in Qatar (QIIC), and offers an Intercultural Certificate program.

**WISE (Workshop on Intercultural Skills Enhancement) Conference**, <https://global.wfu.edu/global-campus/wise-conference/>, is a conference for faculty leaders, program coordinators, and administrators to develop the knowledge and skills needed to help students advance their intercultural skills and awareness during their abroad experiences. Presenters share the latest knowledge and techniques through interactive sessions and presentations.

#### 5. Applications: Tools and Techniques

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For practical application tools, a number of excellent workshops, seminars, toolkits, and books can guide faculty in developing activities, assignments, and approaches to immediately apply to their programs. These opportunities can be provided to large groups for small costs, enabling faculty can learn directly from experts in intercultural competence and gain techniques to use in their courses and programs.



**Building Cultural Competence: Innovative Activities and Models**, edited by Kate Berardo and Darla Deardorff (2012), provides step-by-step instructions for how to effectively work with models, frameworks, and exercises for building learners' cultural competence.

**Developing Intercultural Competence and Transformation: Theory, Research and Application in International Education**, edited by Victor Savicki (2008), defines central concepts of intercultural competence, sets it within the framework of transformative learning theory, and offers ideas and strategies for facilitating its development.

**Institute for Cross-Cultural Teaching and Learning**, <https://www.ifcctl.com/webinars.html> offers workshops and webinars focusing on applying theory to practice.

**Learning through a PRISM: Facilitating Student Intercultural Learning Abroad**, by Tracy Rundstrom Williams (2018), provides background content and pedagogical tools, including sample readings, assignments, and curricular tools for study abroad, cultural courses, and intercultural programming.

**NAFSA Teaching, Learning, & Scholarship On-Demand Seminars**, specifically "Improve Your Intercultural Training Through Transformative Learning," <https://www.nafsa.org/professional-resources/learning-and-training/improve-your-intercultural-training-through-transformative-learning>, offers advice on how to select, sequence, and time activities that more effectively engage students in their intercultural experience.

**Preparing to Study Abroad: Learning to Cross Cultures** by Steven T. Duke (2014), is a student-oriented book to offering strategies for learning about and exploring cultural differences and similarities, and advice about how to actively observe and participate in local life.

**True North Intercultural**, <https://www.truenorthintercultural.com/> provides online training, as well as customized consulting, workshops and coaching to develop educators' own intercultural competence, as well as their capacities for fostering others' intercultural learning.



## CONCLUSION

Effectively involving more faculty in intercultural and global experiences requires training and education. Faculty are experts in their disciplines, but just as we invest in helping them grow as teachers of their disciplines, or train them for other roles and responsibilities related to the health and safety of taking students abroad, we must also provide them a mechanism to develop skills and tools that facilitate intercultural learning. With the growing resources, such as those included here, this can be a realistic goal for SIOs.

## AUTHOR

Dr. Tracy Rundstrom Williams is the Associate Director of the Center for International Studies at Texas Christian University, where she coordinates the curricular and scholarship components of study abroad and assists with faculty and student global learning. In addition, she teaches courses on global citizenship and leads the Global Academy Panama study abroad program. Her contributions to intercultural learning include the resource book Learning through a PRISM and the "Change Your LENS" model for understanding intercultural encounters.

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