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SIT Study Abroad
School for International Training



Inclusion and Diversity in Study Abroad: How to Create an Inclusive Environment

A Thematic Forum sponsored by AIEA and SIT Study Abroad

Forum Report: September 15, 2015

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A Letter From the Vice Provost, Priscilla Stone

On Tuesday, August 4, 2015, SIT Study Abroad hosted an AIEA Thematic Forum, “Inclusion and Diversity in Study Abroad: How to Create an Inclusive Environment”, on its Brattleboro, Vermont campus. The day-long discussion was extremely lively and important, including educators from around the world as well as around the U.S., exploring many aspects of this compelling topic.

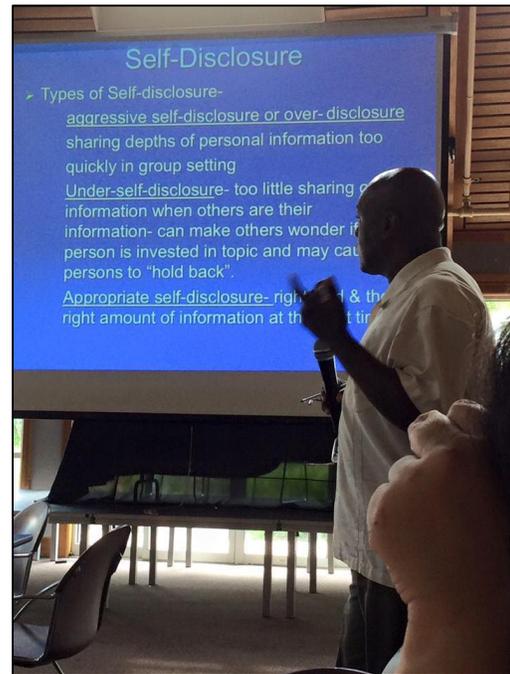
All Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the country, including SIT, have been making major, institution-wide commitments to inclusion through scholarships, student support programs, curricular changes, and more. As HEIs set their inclusion goals, internationalization administrators are confronting unique challenges and opportunities related to making study abroad more inclusive, accommodating students representing diversity, and capitalizing on the unique educational opportunities arising from diverse student groups in foreign settings.

This forum addressed these issues of access and inclusion with a focus on creating practical solutions to increasing the diversity of the students that pursue, participate and thrive in study abroad programs. We asked difficult questions such as: How can higher education internationalization administrators promote and accommodate diverse students in study abroad and other international programs in host countries that may have radically different definitions of and approaches towards diversity and inclusiveness? How can we enrich study abroad programs’ curricula and learning outcomes by incorporating and directly addressing diversity?

We were especially pleased to host Michael Benitez, the Dean for Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Puget Sound, as our keynote speaker. His participation would not have been possible without the generous support of AIEA. We also were able to include a wide group of SIT Study Abroad Directors from around the world, as well as representatives from leading colleges nationwide. Dynamic small group discussions followed each panel and report backs and conversations continued over lunch and during breaks.

While diversity in study abroad is a large and complex topic, we were pleased with the vigor of the presentations and the insights emerging from the discussions. SIT is continuing this work, sharing best practices and resources, developing training and other materials. We hope to contribute to the more global discussions about diversity and inclusion in this way and to keep the very lively and energetic debates going forward.

We thank all those who participated, planned, spoke, sponsored and enlivened this event and we especially thank AIEA for its support and sponsorship.



Forum Agenda

The day's agenda proceeded as follows:

8:30: Welcome and Introductory Comments on Inclusion and Diversity

Provost, John Lucas, PhD

Vice Provost, Priscilla Stone, PhD

Academic Dean for International Honors Programs, David Shallenberger, PhD

9:00: Keynote Speaker: Michael Benitez Jr.: The Conviction Behind the Work: Engaging Inclusion and Diversity in Study Abroad."

Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, University of Puget Sound

In his keynote, Benitez posed a fundamental question: "How can educators engage in conversations about historical, systemic and political underpinnings and constructions of power, disparity and difference situated across organizational and societal spaces?" He challenged the audience to think through the many and varied axes of identity and how our values surrounding social justice and inclusion may affect which identity is most salient in how we present and understand ourselves. He urged participants to include dominant as well as subordinate voices in the process of defining and exploring diversity and to encourage students to be courageous in admitting to their own privileges, and to allowing themselves to be open to their own complex positionality.

10:00-10:30: Coffee Break

10:30-11:15: Panel Discussion: Who Are Our Students?

Students in their early twenties are going through significant change with respect to their identity, values, and relationships—all of which contribute to their way of interacting with others who are "different". Study abroad enhances and complicates that evolution in powerful ways. Knowing about this journey to "self-authorship" can help us develop programs that are more successful and impactful.

Panelists: Linda Gobbo, SIT Graduate Institute; Cloud Baffour, U. of Colorado, Beau Pritchett, SIT Study Abroad Madagascar.

Gobbo reminded attendees all that Study Abroad students are typically at an age where they are working on their own definitions of self and identity, and she described different forms of intercultural maturity (cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal). This intersects in interesting ways with the depiction of Millennials, whose social profile includes both individualism as well as team playing. Baffour spoke to her work with undergraduate study abroad advising at the University of Colorado and the complex interplay of students' self-awareness of why they wish to study abroad and her professional sense of what might be a good fit with their professional and academic issues. Pritchett described the complex task of balancing different types of students in a small group abroad, often subject to the experiences and interests of individuals.

11:15-11:45: **Small Group Discussions**

11:45-Noon: **Report Outs to Full Group**

Group discussion explored how these insights into developmental stages could be used productively on programs. It was suggested that coupling learning styles with sensitivity to students' needs would be useful – framing education/teaching models to reflect insights about our students—as well as being sensitive to the connection of the intellect with emotion/feeling/sentiment. Other groups explored the best way to prepare students to uncover important dimensions of diversity and inclusion with regard to study abroad. Some suggested that there should be preparation around issues of diversity – race gender, sexuality – before students go abroad, as well as discussion of diversity and inclusion in the local context. The special challenges for heritage students and students from different ethnic backgrounds was also discussed.

Noon-1:30: **Lunch in Dining Hall**

Opportunity to Meet Diverse SIT Staff and Faculty

1:30-2:15: **Panel Discussion: How to Create an Inclusive Environment**

What should we do to make sure that students are welcome, that all voices are heard, and that no one perspective, belief, or identity is privileged? And how do we do that in a way that opens powerful dialogue around inclusivity and inequity?

Panelists: Ken Williams, SIT Graduate Institute; Chris Westcott, International Honors Program; and Adrian Beaulieu, Providence College.

Williams spoke about the many strategies he has used in his work teaching graduate students as well as with NGO communities to introduce and interrogate the subject of diversity and inclusion. These debates have changed greatly over the years and our current students and faculty are situated in a far different space in terms of articulating and identifying sources of diversity and difference. He presented good common-sense advice about how to think and act on these new dynamics.

Westcott shared many of the strategies and approaches that IHP (the International Honors Program) has used to foster group cohesion and establish good rapport and a sense of a learning community. He discussed the dynamic between openly discussing these issues with the entire group (icebreakers, find commonalities, debrief often, engage in community-building exercises) with the need for more private one-on-one check-ins with students as well as less structured open reflection/free time/space. He suggested that time spent at the beginning establishing group norms/agreements is very valuable. Beaulieu spoke from the point of view of his institution, Providence College, and its understanding of study abroad, social justice, and diversity and inclusion. He presented a fascinating case study for the way institutional culture affects the kinds of pedagogical approaches and values that may get built into study abroad programming.

2:15-2:45: **Small Group Discussions**

2:45-3:00: **Report Outs to Full Group**

Group discussion focused on some of the practical implications of these insights. How can we incorporate these insights into our orientation program? Many thought that early discussions about race and other sources of diversity early on would be especially important. There was agreement that student groups should be structured to (1) encourage sharing vulnerabilities, (2) place emphasis on intersectionality during orientation and check points during semester, (3) have constant debriefing that gives students space and time to talk about these issues and group dynamics, and (4) encourage students to link their positionality with their experiences in country within an academic frame.

3:00-3:30: **Coffee Break**

3:30-4:15: **Panel Discussion: What To Do When Difficult Situations Arise**

Even when we create inclusive cultures, issues arise. How do we respond? What skills, competencies, and actions are necessary to respond to the uncomfortable encounter, challenge, or discomfoting experience?

Panelists: *Julia Karpicz, World Learning; Margery Ganz, Spelman College; and Dan Lumonya, SIT Study Abroad Uganda and Rwanda.*

Karpicz, Disability Services Coordinator at SIT, discussed the role of the Office of Disability Services in supporting students with a broad range of disabilities, including physical, learning, psychiatric, chronic medical, and temporary disabilities. She noted that students may have more than one type of disability and that disabilities are often invisible. Students with disabilities may not always be registered with the DS Office. There are many types of barriers—both physical and attitudinal—that students may face, and faculty abroad need to be alert to the students and their needs. Active listening and asking questions like the following can be helpful: What would be most helpful for you in this situation? What are some things that you consider unhelpful? Which terminology would you prefer that I use?



Ganz spoke to the special approaches she has taken over several decades at Spelman College to encourage a high rate of study abroad participation among her African American female students, as well as the special challenges they may face while abroad as they explore their identities—racially, as privileged Americans, and within the group of study abroad students. Lumonya spoke to the techniques he has used in leading SIT Study Abroad programs in East Africa, especially in discussing difficult and painful topics such as the Rwandan genocide and our

understandings of what may have been its causes and consequences in terms of diversity and difference.

4:15-4:45: **Small Group Discussions**

4:45-5:00: **Report Outs to Full Group**

This panel provoked many case studies of difficult group dynamics and possible ways to work with these problems. The issue of cliques was raised and the advice was to broker an open conversation about this and invite students to role play the issue and suggest ideas for overcoming these divisions. The challenges of whether it is better to handle this in public or private were discussed. The importance of listening without judging was emphasized. Letting students know they are being heard (show sympathy, acknowledge) while getting all perspectives to the story (ask all players), giving students the space to voice concerns and enlisting students/listen to students, ask them what they need to help (when appropriate).

5:00-6:00: **Reception and Barbeque**

Conference Outcomes and Dissemination

We were very fortunate to have a provocative and engaging set of speakers and panelists to spark discussion and debate. Especially important was the effort to establish some common sets of understandings and starting points – Who are our students? What understandings of identity and diversity are they bringing from their home campuses into the study abroad context? How do they interact with one another and with the community abroad on diversity and inclusion issues? And importantly, how can we facilitate and nurture a healthy and educational environment for discussion and exploration?

We all came away from the day with some very concrete sense of how to better address these issues in our programs abroad, but with many questions to continue to explore and share more widely. We intend to create a “toolbox” around this topic – readings, notes, PowerPoints, etc. – to keep the conversation going among our SIT family. We also will plan to share some of what we have learned in our newsletters, on the SIT website, and in our curriculum (all of which is online).



Suggestions for Future AIEA Forums

There are many related topics that we would suggest as excellent AIEA Forum topics including:

- Specific focus on certain kinds of diversity – e.g. LGBTQ, differently-abled, etc.
- An exploration of the academic implications of this topic – e.g. theories of race and identity – as they relate to international education.
- Minority vs majority – how to construct students experience of being in a minority for the first time. How do we define and interpret this?
- Practical toolkits for ice breakers, community building exercises, debriefing strategies. A “how to” on inclusion and diversity.

Appendix: Budget Actuals Report

Expense Item	AIEA Request	Actuals: AIEA Grant Allocations	Actuals: World Learning Cost Share	Notes on Actuals
Travel and Lodging			Over \$74,000 in travel and lodging for SIT Academic Directors.	The forum was scheduled to coincide with SIT's Academic Director workshops. SIT paid for travel and lodging for over 40 of its own Academic Directors to attend the event. Partners from over 30 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) nationwide typically pay for their own travel and lodging to attend the SIT workshops.
Food and drink	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$3,025	Includes breakfast, lunch, cocktail reception, and barbecue on 4 August
Speaker stipends	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$2,000	Keynote speaker
Speaker travel and lodging	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$237	Keynote and outside panelist travel and lodging. Six other panelists were from SIT's own faculty and staff so there were no travel or lodging fees for them.
Meeting space			\$1,000	SIT provided space in kind
Total	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$80,000+	