

“Diversity in Education Abroad: Why It Matters to the Nation”

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I am honored to be with you this morning as we consider issues related to diversity in education abroad, a topic of critical importance for individuals, for our nation, and for the world. I would like to applaud the Academy for Educational Development for undertaking its Education Abroad Initiative and for its decision, within that rubric, to turn attention to the issue of Diversity in Education Abroad.

As we begin our discussions this morning, I would like to focus on three questions:

- Why does this matter?
- Are we really serious about this issue?
- Are we asking the right questions?

However, first, it is important to frame our conversation. The word diversity carries multiple meanings and includes many categories by which an individual may be marked: for example, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, among others. When considering the issue of access to education abroad, lumping these multiple categories together does not seem useful because the factors that may serve as barriers, as well as the issues related to promoting an optimal learning abroad experience, may be quite different depending upon the category under consideration. For the purposes of our conversation this morning, I want to focus on ethnic diversity in study abroad. Several factors have informed this decision:

- I am most knowledgeable about the experience of students of color, particularly African-American students.
- AED’s framing of this issue focuses principally on race/ethnicity and economic disadvantage.
- Other aspects of diversity (sexual orientation, physical abilities, special learning needs, age) occur within all ethnic groups. As such, these aspects of diversity must be addressed as we attempt to meet the individual needs of students in the education abroad experience.

The results of the most recent 2003/04 Open Doors Report sets forth very clearly the challenge before us.¹ In 2003/04, over 191,300 students at all levels of higher education studied abroad. This represents an increase of 150% in a ten-year period. That’s the good news. The challenging news is that during the same ten-year period the participation rates for African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and Native Americans remains virtually unchanged. Moreover, the participation rates do not reflect the increased presence of these groups within the higher education community. In 2001, approximately 67% of undergraduates labeled themselves as white, 11.5% labeled

¹ Institute of International Education, Open Doors 2005, *Report on International Educational Exchange, PROFILE OF U.S. STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS, 1993/94 – 2003/04.*

themselves as African-American and nearly 10% identified as Hispanic. In spite of these enrollment figures, approximately 84 percent of those who studied abroad were white. The study abroad participation rate for African-Americans was 3.4 % and for Hispanic-Americans, 5%. These data suggest that students of color have not been able to participate in the transformational experience that study abroad provides.

Why does this matter?

I would argue that the skill of intercultural competence coupled with a global perspective is essential for anyone who aspires to provide leadership in the 21st century. These skills will be required for every sector: be it political, business, public policy, or not-for-profit.

By intercultural competence I mean:

- The capacity to recognize our global interconnectedness: politically, economically, socially, and ecologically,
- The capacity to respect difference,
- The ability to see an issue from multiple perspectives,
- The willingness to adapt to new situations,
- The capacity to put one's self at the margins.

A global perspective presumes intercultural competence informed by knowledge of the history and the impact of various forms of dominance—for example, colonialism, neo-colonialism, rampant multinational capitalism, or racism—on opportunity within and among nations.

During this century, we will witness technological innovations and demographic shifts that are unparalleled in human history. According to Erik Petersen of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, by 2025 throughout the globe, we will encounter seven intersecting revolutions that will have significant impact on the quality of our lives.²

I would like to highlight very briefly a few:

- Population: The world will have a population of about 8 billion, the vast majority of whom will live in China, India, the United States and Nigeria.
- Resource Management: Food consumption will double by 2035 and humankind will be called upon to manage much more carefully and justly our resources, particularly fresh water, food and energy.
- Economic Integration: By 2025 no one will question the fact that the world is flat. The speed and efficiency of business operations worldwide will eliminate the notion that greater geographic distance results in increased costs. We will enter an era of unparalleled global economic competition. And yet, in spite of the increased opportunities for economic growth, the income gaps within nations will increase.

² Peterson, Erik R. (2006, March). Seven Revolutions Initiative. Center for Strategic and International Studies. [Online] Available: <http://www.7revs.org>

- Conflict: We will be exposed to new forms of warfare—most of which will not be associated with the nation-state. One person with the right strokes on a computer will have the capacity to bring the interconnected global economy to a halt. Access to weapons that have the capacity to do considerable harm will not be controlled necessarily by national governments. World-wide conflicts may be manipulated and expressed as conflicts over belief systems rather than economic systems.
- Knowledge: Access to knowledge and information will no longer be restricted by national barriers or accident of birth. Virtual universities will result in the creation of new cyberspace communities of learning—borne out of interest and access to appropriate technology.

If we take seriously these projections, another picture emerges: namely Americans have no right to assume that this country will continue to be the center of the economic and political universe. Since the fall of the Soviet block, the United States of America has proclaimed itself and, to a large extent, has been recognized as the world's only super power. Many of our educational institutions, as manifested by curricular and co-curricular programs, operate as if this supremacy is guaranteed in perpetuity. I would argue that we have a responsibility to educate students for a world in which the economic, political and military preeminence that has been a part of our most recent history can no longer be guaranteed.

In the context of this emerging reality, the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoken in 1961, take on new meaning. *“All life is interrelated. We are all caught up in a web of mutuality: tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”*³

Well-developed education abroad programs, which allow for authentic interaction with residents of the host country, provide a unique opportunity for personal redefining and for the development of intercultural competence and a global perspective. However, it is not education abroad, in and of itself, which is important. It is the role that such education abroad plays in personal reframing and in the development of intercultural competence and a global perspective that makes education abroad important.

The limited participation of students of color in education abroad has consequences at both the national and personal levels. In conversations with leaders in the business sector, those of us in the academy are repeatedly reminded of the importance of preparing a work force that is ready for the global economy. Corporate leaders are looking for employees who are versatile in other languages and who have the capacity to work effectively in teams that are diverse. More and more, work will require the capacity to operate both cross-nationally and cross-culturally. Given that these manpower needs are currently unmet, without the increased participation of students of color in study abroad

³ King, Martin Luther, Jr. (1961). Commencement Address at Lincoln University (Pennsylvania). Reprinted in James Melvin Washington (Ed.) (1986) *A Testament of Hope* (p. 210). San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers.

activities, this shortage will only be exacerbated as the work force in our nation becomes increasingly diverse.

The under representation of students of color in study abroad is not merely a challenge for corporate America. Members of minority ethnic groups are greatly underrepresented in the field of international affairs. At a recent Higher Education Summit, jointly sponsored by the secretaries of State and Education, Secretary Rice underscored the need for our diplomatic presence in the world to reflect more accurately the face of America. She emphasized her strong desire to diversify the Department of State and the diplomatic core and stressed the importance of increasing education abroad opportunities for Americans of all backgrounds.

The education abroad experience impacts each student uniquely and, consequently, it is difficult to talk in precise terms about what is lost or gained for the individual student of color who, for whatever reason, does not study abroad. Suffice it to say that most students find study abroad an empowering experience. Most return to this country with increased competence, improved linguistic facility, and more well-defined career goals. If students of color have not had an opportunity to study abroad, they will find themselves at a disadvantage in a labor market that increasingly values international experience and global competence.

For some students of color the study abroad experience represents the first time in their lives when skin color does not matter or carries very different connotations. Professor Joy Carew notes: "I have witnessed repeated examples of how students removed from the social and political context of the United States, have been able to revise their views of themselves and to reach beyond other peoples' perceptions of their abilities."⁴

Our experience at Kalamazoo College is not as definitive. It suggests that African-American students in particular have very differing responses to the experience of living outside the confines of the racial structures of the United States. The following excerpts come from two African-American women students who studied abroad in Kenya during the same time period:

The first student commented, "I realized that race is something that is used to set me apart, to really divide my identity, to make it seem as though I am not a whole person. When I was in Kenya I didn't have a race: everyone was black, everyone had brown eyes and kinky hair. I realized that my features made others associate me with Kenya rather than the U.S, where I was born. White people from the U.S would excitedly talk to other white persons about their experiences. Kenyans would seek out white people on the street. My "foreignness" went unnoticed and for the first time I really felt like I didn't belong anywhere and that my identity was divided and that I wanted fellowship, I wanted to be American and linked to that identity but I was ignored. For the first time I felt the need to have a nation where I could be whole, recognized, and part of a community. I am now still searching for a homeland."

⁴ Carew, Joy. (1993, January 6). Minority Students Abroad: an Inspiring Experience. *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

A second student wrote: "In the US, and especially at the college I attend, I stand out as the only person of color in most settings. In Kenya, it was the first time... that my physical appearance allowed me the benefit of "fitting in". I could undoubtedly pass for Kenyan. It was not until this experience did I realize how much of my college experience---my daily happiness, my self-esteem, my sanity--was embedded in how I felt about the color of my skin. My color was always an issue. It is the first thing people recognized about me....On study abroad that heavy weight I unconsciously carried, was lifted, and I was able to more objectively look at my experiences at Kalamazoo College. Most beneficial to this identity healing process I was experiencing was the realization of my American self. I am American too. By taking the time to fully accept the American side of my identity, I also found a way to connect to others not in my racial group. Most importantly, I learned how to live without the pressure of putting my color first, whether people noticed it or not. I found a way to be simply me."

By contrast an African-American male who studied in Madrid reports: "Study abroad was an interesting experience in terms of my ethnicity and nationality. I was assumed to be a Dominican most of the time because I was "brown skinned" and not "black" like most people of African descent that the Madrileños were familiar with. For many people I encountered I was the first Black-American they had ever met. I dealt with lots of curious stares, but no outright racism. Viewed as an extremely different person and having few people to relate to of my background was challenging, but it was not difficult to make friends. I left with a greater sense of pride as a black American and an appreciation of Spanish culture."⁵

Whatever the outcome, the education abroad experience enables students of color to address these identity issues from a new and, perhaps, more critical perspective.

Whether viewed from an individual or a national perspective, the lack of participation of students of color in education abroad programs represents yet another manifestation of our nation's lack of the will to make use of all of its talent. This "will-less-ness" persists at our nation's peril.

This leads to my second question: Are we really serious about this issue?

I read with great interest many of the explanations given for the lack of participation of African-American and Hispanic students in education abroad. Student-related explanations included—lack of previous experience with study abroad including the absence of mentors who had had international experience, fear of racism in other countries, lack of awareness regarding the available opportunities, and financial concerns; parental factors included fear as well as lack of financial and emotional support for the student's desire to study abroad; institutional concerns included inappropriate outreach, lack of support from faculty and advisors, poor media representations of students of color in study abroad materials as well as financial and curricular policies that serve as barriers.

⁵ Personal correspondence to President Wilson-Oyelaran

In reviewing the literature, I was struck by the absence of a scholarly examination of the issue. Much that has been written is anecdotal and fails to address the complexity of the intra-group differences that exist among the students we are trying to serve. It seems to me that if we were really serious about addressing the lack of participation of students of color in education abroad, we would bring to this issue the rigorous scholarly examination that we bring to other aspects of our work.

I would argue that this type of investigation must be done at the campus level and must begin with a thorough understanding of the students who are being served on that particular campus. Clearly, the challenges of promoting education abroad opportunities at a community college where the majority of students are enrolled in the college transfer program on a full time basis are vastly different from those at an institution where the majority of students are parents who are employed full-time and enrolled in school part-time. These examinations should assess students' willingness to study abroad, the degree to which the faculty and administration promote such study as an integral aspect of the educational experience, the degree to which specific institutional policies, particularly financial aid and academic policies, militate against study abroad. It is only after a systematic campus-based assessment has been executed that the institution can build a plan for change.

Such a plan for change must involve the following:

- An institutional vision that includes both an overall percentage goal for participation in study abroad as well as targeted and carefully monitored participation rates for students from racial/ethnic and economic groups that have been historically underrepresented.
- Leadership from the highest levels of the institution, particularly the president and provost. Campus leaders must make it clear that access to and inclusiveness in the study abroad component of the educational program is an institutional priority.
- Policies must be analyzed to ensure they promote rather than inhibit participation.
- Faculty and other members of the academic community must be brought on board.
- From the initial contact with students, i.e., during recruitment, the importance of the education abroad experience must be articulated so that new expectations are created among students and their parents.

I challenge our commitment (and by our, I mean the academic community) because none of this is rocket science, it is simply good strategic planning. There is no uniform way to address this issue. As I have suggested previously, the assessments and the resolutions must be campus-based.

By looking briefly at two very different campuses that have made great strides in engaging underrepresented minorities in education abroad, what I hope to suggest is that the key to addressing the challenge of under-representation of students of color in study abroad is vision, strategic planning, and implementation.

Kalamazoo College, a highly selective residential liberal arts college in southwest Michigan, boasts a study abroad participation rate of approximately 85%. Based on combined data from the last three years, 72% of students from minority ethnic groups participated in study abroad, with African-Americans participating at the rate of 58%, Hispanic-Americans at 68% and Asian-Americans at 76%. More than 85% of Kalamazoo College students who study abroad do so for a semester or longer.

Let us briefly consider the seminal elements of study abroad at Kalamazoo College. At Kalamazoo, study abroad is not just available, it is unavoidable. It is a part of the ethos of the College. It is also part of the budgeting process. Students pay the same tuition whether they are on campus or on study abroad.

The study abroad programs are not “owned” by particular departments or faculty. The Center for International Programs holds them in trust for the entire College (students, faculty, staff, alumni) and works to keep all stakeholders connected to the programs overseas and vice versa.

Kalamazoo began its study abroad programs in the early 1960's. In 1966, the College implemented a curriculum often referred to as the K Plan. As part of that plan all students, regardless of major, were required to study abroad. Consequently, academic departments determined how to offer their majors and still leave room for their students to spend at least a semester overseas. As an aside I should note that Kalamazoo College has historically produced a significant number of students who major in the sciences and continue to earn the doctorate or a professional medical degree. The science faculty developed an outstanding undergraduate curriculum that allows students to study abroad for at least a semester without adding additional time to the degree.

In recent years, a change in the academic calendar resulted in the removal of the mandate that all students would study abroad. Today, study abroad at Kalamazoo is an expectation, a very strong expectation. The question at Kalamazoo is not “whether” you will study abroad, but “where?”

The study abroad program's overarching goal of cultural integration shapes the types of programs available to our students:

- University direct enrollment (Spain, France, Germany, Australia, Ecuador, Kenya, Senegal)
- Language and Culture programs run by the university's Institute for Foreign Students (Spain, France, Germany, China, Japan)
- Collaborative programs in Sustainable and Community Development working with NGOs and local communities (Thailand, Mexico)
- Environmental Studies (university-based) (Ecuador, Costa Rica)

Even when we have the students in an English-language environment, we work to integrate them through:

- Home stays with local families or having local students as roommates in the dorm

- Service-Learning/volunteer opportunities in local social service agencies, shelters, and NGO's.

At Kalamazoo, study abroad is central to the fulfillment of the institutional mission....
*“to prepare its graduates to better understand, live successfully within, and provide enlightened leadership to a richly diverse and increasingly complex world.”*⁶

As a consequence, at Kalamazoo College many of the challenges associated with lack of participation in study abroad among students of color do not arise. The program is inclusive because education abroad is central to the mission and has the highest levels of administrative support as well as campus buy-in. I should note that the funding of study abroad is not easy. Our decision to continue on this path represents the priority given to this goal in contrast to other areas of pressing needs, for example, improved compensation or renovation of residential and athletic facilities.

By contrast to Kalamazoo College, Winston-Salem State University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina is a historically black, comprehensive institution with a student body of approximately 5400 students. The average age of students is 25 years.

WSSU established an Office of International Programs (OIP) in August 2000. Prior to that date, only three students had gone on study abroad through other institutions or providers.

By the end of 2005:

- Internationalization had become one the initiatives in the on-going capital campaign.
- An endowment of one million dollars to support language-focused experience abroad had been established.
- At least 20 students had participated annually in semester- or year-long study abroad and 30 students had participated in short-term programs in Benin Republic, Trinidad, Mexico, Finland and China.
- Study abroad linkages in non-traditional sites: The University of the West Indies at St. Augustine, The University of the Western Cape (South Africa), China, and Brazil had been established.
- The University had set a study abroad participation rate goal of at least 5% of the total enrollment to be achieved within five years (2010) and a goal for on campus representation of international students at 2.5% of the student body.
- In addition, the campus has committed itself to curriculum internationalization.

To achieve these goals the OIP began by developing a mission statement:

The mission of Winston-Salem State University Office of International Programs is to initiate, coordinate, and execute programs and activities to enable Winston-Salem State University to accomplish the strategic objectives embodied in its Shared Vision

⁶ Kalamazoo College mission statement, academic catalog. [Online]
 Available: <http://www.kzoo.edu/regist/>

*Statement, in particular, to enable the institution to prepare its students for a wholesome life of responsive citizenship, leadership and service in the global society.*⁷

The mission was embraced by the campus community and received support from the provost and the chancellor. As a result, commitment to and support of the mission was provided by the Student Services, faculty, and the Office of University Advancement. Policies were redesigned (particularly financial aid policies) to facilitate participation in study abroad.

Several identical features appear in each of these cases, a vision of participation, a commitment from the top, a willingness to address the challenge of resources and to restructure academic and financial policies that inhibit participation. Finally, the expectation for participation is set early in the student's academic career.

There is a final question that I hope will get some serious consideration in your discussions today, that is: Are we asking the right question? Let me begin by stating categorically that I am a strong proponent of study abroad. I am an example of an undergraduate whose life was transformed and whose career goals were clarified as a result of my undergraduate study abroad experience.

However, it is important to recognize that there are many types of experiences that currently fall under the rubric of study abroad. These include choir tours of brief duration; semester-long travel programs where a group of students reside together and take courses taught by a faculty member who has accompanied them from the home campus. Study abroad can also include groups of students who travel, without faculty, to a country where they study with locals, live with families and engage in community service for a semester or a year. Each of these models gives students some sense of life outside of the United States; however, they are not equally effective in promoting the development of intercultural competence and a global perspective.

Moreover, not all of our students will be able to study abroad. There are some students who because of their life circumstances may find study abroad a very difficult option. This may be particularly true of under-represented students who are more likely to be parents, or to attend school part-time or to have employers who are not supportive of the study abroad experience because of the disruption it causes at the work place. Demographic projections suggest that the number of students in these circumstances is likely to increase.

Consequently, we must ensure that our campuses are structured to promote the development of intercultural competence and global perspective. Our goal should be the comprehensive internationalization of our campuses. Study abroad may play a central role in the acquisition of a global perspective; however, I would argue that if the curriculum is sufficiently challenging and comprehensively internationalized, the

⁷ Winston-Salem State University Office of International Programs mission statement. [Online] Available: <http://www.WSSU/About/Administration/Office+of+the+Provost/, Office+of+International+Programs/>

rudiments of intercultural competence and a global perspective can be attained without study abroad.

Given new technologies and increased global mobility, there are many new opportunities for increasing the global competence of our students. Global communications networks allow for pedagogical innovations which until recently were impossible or prohibited by cost. Faculty teaching the same course on two different continents can engage their classes in joint case study analysis. Electronic threaded discussions allow students in France, the Benin Republic and the US to discuss the same text or other aspects of their course work on a regular basis. New immigration patterns provide opportunities for international/intercultural immersion, if we recognize and take advantage of them. By building community partnerships with local immigrant communities we can provide domestic opportunities for mutual learning and for the development of the sense of respect and humility that emerges when students and community members come together as equals in an effort to address an issue of mutual concern.

At no time in our history has the development of intercultural competence and a global perspective been more important than it is today. In the future these skills will become increasingly important. I salute AED for addressing the issue of diversity in education abroad and wish you most stimulating deliberations.