



Years ago, when universities strove for diversity in their study abroad programs, the goals likely seemed binary—to attract women and men, African-American students as well as Caucasians. Today, it's not so simple.

“On our campus, diversity covers a broad spectrum of identities and intersections, including military veterans, students with varying disabilities, religion, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race and nationality,” says Aaron Bruce, Ph.D., Chief Diversity Officer at San Diego State University (SDSU). “We’re spending a lot more time looking at ways to engage students with multiple racial identities or intersections of identities and figuring out how to effectively support them in an international experience.”

Four years ago, SDSU piloted a short-term, faculty-led program to the Dominican Republic aimed at African-American males. Bruce, who leads the program, partnered with an African-American male student organization on campus to create a study abroad opportunity in an affordable location with appealing activities. The program on global leadership includes tours of the U.S. Embassy and State Department, a fair trade apparel factory and a coffee farm. Participants also study the impact of baseball in the Dominican Republic and do a community service project with the Haitian population.

“We’ve adjusted some of our marketing strategies and curriculum to appeal to young men, who tend to travel in packs and bring their buddies along,” says Bruce. “[The program has] helped at least break the ice and get more men of color interested in study abroad.”

**SCHOOLS STRIVE TO
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TERRADOTTA

Ensuring that all students have access to study abroad opportunities isn't merely a numbers game—you have X number of Hispanic students on campus, and Y percentage are studying abroad. "It has less to do with the transactional aspect and more to do with the benefits gained," says Andrew Gordon, CEO and Founder of Diversity Abroad,

which connects students and young professionals to international opportunities. "We talk about the academic, personal and career benefits of study abroad. So it's a question of educational equity: How do we ensure that all of our students have access to a high-quality education, which should include aspects of a global education?"

CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHOOLS

Attracting a broad spectrum of students to study abroad can be difficult. Gordon says the challenges boil down to three main points:

1.

Creating overall awareness that international opportunities exist. "When you talk to student groups that traditionally haven't enrolled in colleges and universities, such as first-generation students, you need to let those students know about all the opportunities," says Gordon. "You need to tell them that study abroad exists."

2.

Convincing students that study abroad is an option for them. It's one thing for traditionally under-represented students to know that a school offers study abroad programs; it's another thing for those students to believe the programs are a good fit for them. "You need to help students appreciate why study abroad is an option for them," says Gordon.

3.

Supporting diverse identities before, during and after trips abroad. Once students have signed on to a program, they'll need support—and it may differ from the support you offer other students. "The diversity conversation is often focused on numbers or enrollment, which is an important aspect," says Gordon. "Inclusion, on the other hand, can be more challenging as it involves supporting students before, during and after education abroad." For instance, what unique challenges will a gay student face in Kenya or an atheist in Indonesia? Universities need to prepare students in advance for any issues related to their identities that they may face while abroad, then continue that support onsite and after the students return to campus.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) has created study abroad programs and support systems intended to tackle all those challenges. One such program is the UW Global

Gateway Program, a four-week, faculty-led program that is fully funded: Program fees and airfare are covered for each of the 15 participants. The program took place in China for two years and will now be held in Rio de Janeiro for three years, where students will learn about the history and culture of Brazil. "The program is designed to attract students who had not considered studying abroad or would not have gone abroad in the future," says Susan Lochner Atkinson, Associate Director of Advising for International Academic Programs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



The university also recently created 12 identity pages on its study abroad website to offer guidance for groups ranging from adult students to veterans and students with disabilities. The pages provide advice on choosing study abroad programs and offer lists of things to consider. They also incorporate resources where students can find more information.

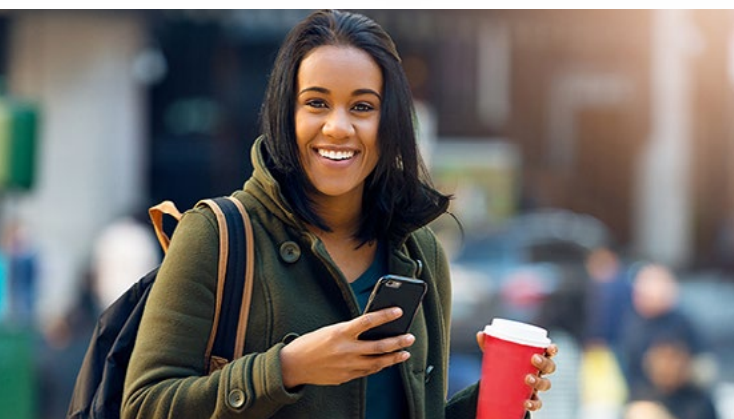
STRATEGIES TO INCREASE DIVERSITY

There are lots of steps schools can take to increase diversity in study abroad, ranging from small actions to institutional initiatives. The first step, says Lochner Atkinson, is to look at your data and see where the gaps are. What student groups are under-represented in study abroad? Armed with that information, try a few of these ideas:

- **Build relationships with campus organizations.**

“No one expects the study abroad office to have all the answers,” says Bruce. “Build authentic partnerships with groups that have a track record with those identities you are trying to target.” That may include multicultural centers, gay-straight alliances, fraternities and sororities, women’s centers and so on. “They can help you move the needle in terms of diversity,” adds Bruce.

- **Promote cohort programs.** SDSU’s program to the Dominican Republic is a great example, where friends are encouraged to sign up in groups. “This way you don’t have your first international experience in isolation. You’re with trusted classmates,” says Bruce. “That’s very helpful in breaking the ice—in giving students a ‘study abroad appetizer’ that might lead to other travel.”



- **Remove institutional barriers.** Previously, the University of Wisconsin-Madison required study abroad participants to have at least a 2.5 grade point average for its faculty-led programs. The school recently lowered the GPA requirement to 2.0, mirroring the university’s condition for remaining a student in good standing. “We were unintentionally creating a barrier, particularly for students of color and male students,” says Lochner Atkinson.

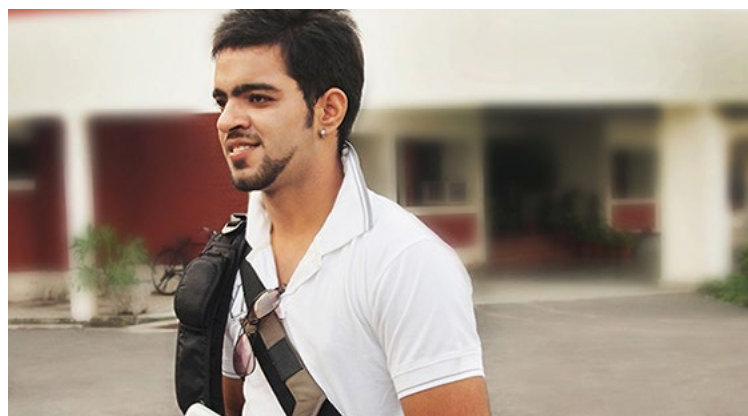
- **Make the process as easy as possible.** Beginning this year, the University of Wisconsin-Madison offers free passport photos to any student. The university also began advising in remote locations, meeting students

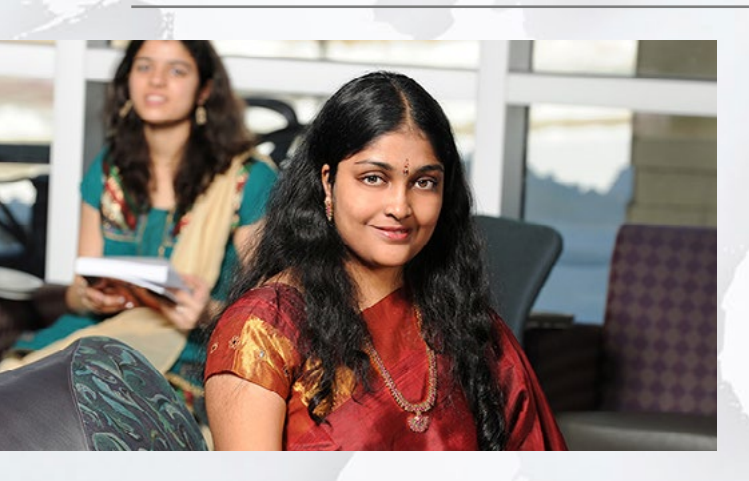


where they are rather than expecting them to come to the International Academic Programs office. School officials have even helped students create PowerPoint presentations to explain to parents why study abroad is important.

- **Create specialized pre-departure orientations.**

In addition to a general orientation, SDSU has begun to offer specialized sessions for LGBTQ students, women of color and others to provide a place where students can ask questions related to their identities and travel and meet peers who have studied abroad. “We try to connect them with students with a similar identity who have had that experience,” says Bruce. “Peer-to-peer discussions open up great conversations and resources we may not always know about.”





■ **Cater curriculum to intended audiences.**

“We talk about inclusive curriculum design all the time domestically, but we don’t always explore that internationally,” says Bruce. SDSU asks students what topics they would like to explore, then considers what it would mean to include things like African-centric hairstyles or hip-hop in Berlin into their programs. “Students live in a customized environment where everything digital is at their fingertips,” says Bruce. “Because of the internet, they are shopping around for programs that speak to them.”

- **Diversify your office.** “We spend a lot of time making sure we have a diverse group of people working in our office as advisors who reflect the identities of our students on campus,” says Bruce.

While increasing diversity in study abroad may seem daunting, Gordon encourages universities to move forward using tools like the Access, Inclusion, Diversity & Equity (AIDE) Roadmap to assess current diversity and inclusion practices against benchmarks.



“The conversation about diversity—its challenges and opportunities—will continue for the foreseeable future,” he says. “Diversity can be a scary thing because people don’t want to get it wrong, so there may be hesitation to even engage. But everyone has room to grow. And the only failure in this area is doing nothing at all.”



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