

Chapter 5

Providing Study Abroad Opportunities for Underrepresented Populations: Lessons from the University of California, Riverside

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ABSTRACT

This book chapter aims to provide a detailed case study with supporting data on how the University of California, Riverside has engaged underrepresented study abroad student populations and has made progress toward increasing the number and diversity of students going abroad. It opens by reviewing the relevant literature and providing necessary context of the University and its recent history with short-term, faculty-led study abroad programs. Analyzing relevant student data collected through a survey and focus group leads into sharing a few key strategies undergirding the success and growth of participation in study abroad by underrepresented groups. This chapter focuses on low income students, but also includes a discussion of ethnic minorities, first generation students, male students, and those from STEM-related majors.

INTRODUCTION

As a first-year student, I remember seeing all of the signs for study abroad and thinking I would love to do that, but I already assumed that [it] wasn't a possibility for me. (Hispanic student accepted into summer study abroad program in Greece)

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The perception that study abroad is impossible for underrepresented students, including first-generation, low income, and racial/ethnic minority students, is a common refrain that echoes through university offices and classes, as well as within the study abroad literature (McLellan, 2011; Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2011). This perspective has led faculty and administrators to consider, first, how to articulate the benefits and costs of study abroad for underrepresented populations, and second, how to develop an appropriate strategy for increasing study abroad engagement among these students. By reflecting upon these two points, this chapter will briefly review the study abroad literature related to underrepresented students; examine underrepresented students' perspectives on study abroad captured through surveys and focus groups; and document lessons learned from one university's experience. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for future study abroad research and programs that seek to increase engagement among underrepresented populations.

BACKGROUND

Much attention has focused on how to provide more international and study abroad opportunities for underrepresented students. Currently, the majority of students who study abroad come from elite private colleges and universities, are white and female, have highly educated parents, and major in the arts and humanities (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2013). For the purposes of this chapter, 'underrepresented' will be used as an umbrella term for various student populations that are less represented in study abroad programs in the United States (US). This includes students who are the first in their families to attend college (otherwise known as 'first-generation'), those from low socioeconomic backgrounds (often measured by receiving a federal Pell grant to fund their university education), and racial/ethnic minorities (i.e., African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American).

Although male students and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) majors are not normally considered 'underrepresented' in the general student population, they enter into the discussion here due to their low participation rates in study abroad programs. Finally, another population that is growing in US universities, but remains underrepresented in study abroad programs, are 'undocumented' students; they are sometimes referred to by the acronym DACA: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (US Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2015). Each of these underrepresented groups experiences unique challenges and benefits through study abroad participation.

In examining the lack of diversity in study abroad participation, Murray Brux and Fry (2009) noted that 'study abroad programs offer great potential to benefit students in an increasingly internationalized world and work place' (p. 1), but that several institutional and individual factors prevent underrepresented students from participating in programs. Such factors include academic scheduling difficulties; absence of relevant programs for a diversity of academic majors, particularly among STEM majors; lack of information about the benefits of study abroad e.g., material aimed toward first-generation college students who may not have ever travelled outside the US; financial costs for additional program fees and travel expenses; family concerns, especially among first-generation college students; and fear of racism and discrimination in a foreign country.

Picard and colleagues (2009) observed that 'minority student participation is stagnant at what only can be considered woefully low levels' (p. 323). The Institute for International Education (2014), for example, reported that racial and ethnic minority students represented 24% of total participation in study abroad programs (i.e., African American, Asian American, Hispanic, Multiracial, and Native American

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