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Inclusion in International Higher Education: European Perspectives & Insights

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A House Where All Belong: Re-envisioning Education Abroad through a Systemic Approach

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For the past several decades, international educators have been committed to diversifying the field and whom we serve. There has been great success through internationalisation at home efforts and mobility schemes such as Erasmus, which have helped to dramatically increase the number of university-aged students participating in overseas study, work, and research, going well beyond what had historically been a set of activities reserved primarily for a wealthy and/or well-connected elite.

At the same time, concepts such as "diversity" remain rather murky, without clear definitions that only become more confusing when translated into other languages and cultural settings. Concurrently, there are significant variations on the goals and rationales for diversifying international education, as well as the populations that we aim to serve. And, if that is not enough, it can be challenging – sometimes debilitatingly so – to determine how we can affect real change. It is one thing to profess a set of values and ideals and quite another to shift the needle.

Here, I share a few observations that come out of an upcoming book that I have co-edited, A House Where All Belong: Redesigning Education Abroad for Inclusive Excellence (Gozik & Barclay Hamir, forthcoming), which serves as a sequel to Promoting Inclusion in Education Abroad: A Handbook of Research and Practice (Barclay Hamir & Gozik, 2018). If largely based on the unique context of United States' higher education, key concepts in this volume can be applied in a host of other settings, with the goal of not just increasing diversity yet also in advancing equality and equity. As an example, I explore how one might (re)examine the process through which student participate in education abroad, as part of outbound mobility efforts.

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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DIVERSITY?

Despite the wide use of "diversity", the term is often employed in higher education literature and practice without a clear definition and often with much variation across settings. At first glance, diversity may seem easily translatable into other languages, such as with *diversité*, *diversidad*, and *diversität*, however cultural interpretations vary widely. In the United States, diversity, equity, and inclusion are often combined into "DEI" or "EDI", with the goal of acknowledging that diversity alone, i.e. ensuring representation of individual and group/social differences, is not sufficient, for it is also necessary to guarantee that students are fully included and have equitable opportunities. Likened to a dance by Robert Sellers at the University of Michigan: "diversity is where everyone is invited to the party; inclusion means that everyone gets to contribute to the playlist; and equity means that everyone has the opportunity to dance" (University of Michigan, n.d.).

As part of its Making Excellence Inclusive initiative, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has folded DEI and "equity-mindedness" into a widely adopted framework referred to more generally as "inclusive excellence". AAC&U's original definition (Milem et al., 2005) of this term comes from a strengths-based perspective, with a conviction that *all* students gain more from being in inclusive environments.

These various conceptualisations of diversity speak to very different histories, values, and social norms. It would be impossible to discuss diversity in the United States without acknowledging the nation's unresolved concerns around race and racism, rooted in a history of slavery and discrimination of African Americans, indigenous groups, and others. While activism have been extended to include additional groups that have been historically mistreated or marginalised, e.g. those who identify as LGBTQ+ or are disabled, race remains central to such discussions. Within much of Europe, race has been deemed less relevant based on demographics, as well as due to a ban on this category within research and censuses following World War II and the Holocaust. Instead, there has been a greater focus on ethnicity and religion, in response to immigration within and from outside of Europe, along with other categories such as gender and disability status.

HOW TO MOVE FORWARD? TAKING A SYSTEMIC APPROACH

Whom we are serving largely drives the question of how we move forward. In Europe, much attention has been placed on how to integrate immigrants. In the United States, there too have been calls for integration – or denial at the border, for those who remain anti-immigration. However, those who have arguably been most marginalised, Black and Native Americans, are not coming from outside of the United States; if anything, many can trace their ancestry back much longer than many of their fellow Americans. These examples have presented a different reality: integration is not the sole issue, for much of the inequality and inequities that these groups face are baked into existing systems.

The emphasis on structural change is at the crux of the much-politicised Critical Race Theory (CRT). Now more than 40 years old, "The core idea [of CRT] is that race is a social construct, and that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice, but also something embedded in legal systems and policies" (Sawchuk, 2021). Proponents of CRT and others seeking new approaches to diversity fundamentally believe that systems need to be critically interrogated and revamped, for it is not possible to simply "move on" or assume that racism is a thing of the past.

While it would be unwise to simply transfer an approach that has been born out of a different cultural and historical context, there are some key aspects of this systemic lens that I believe can be adopted within international education, and not just in the United States. Next, we focus on one area, that of education abroad, which comprises overseas study, research, service, and internships.

RETHINKING EDUCATION ABROAD

When my co-editor, Heather Barclay Hamir, and I published *Promoting Inclusion in Education Abroad*, this was the first book devoted entirely to looking at inclusive excellence in education abroad. Contributing authors examined strategies for increasing participation student groups that have been historically underserved in education abroad within the United States, including students with disabilities; first-generation college students; undocumented students; racial and ethnic minorities; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors; and males. While this work filled an important gap, we knew that the work was only partially done: in addition to looking at numbers, we needed to consider students' sense of belonging, as well as the extent to which many of our own preconceived notions of education abroad may be barriers to expanding full access to a wider array of students.

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In preparing for our sequel, *A House Where All Belong*, a key question kept coming up: If we were to redesign education abroad for a different type of student – and not that for whom this programming was originally designed to serve in the United States, i.e. white females, studying the humanities, and from wealthy backgrounds and/or well-resourced institutions of higher education – what would it look like? It was hard to imagine that it would be the same. The offerings would be different, and the systems themselves would have been built differently. While we cannot completely erase existing structures, we were left with a sense that true change would not come about without a thorough and systematic reexamination of the process by which a student goes through the education abroad journey (Fig. 1) – from when they first matriculate on campus and begin to learn about overseas options to when they return from overseas. This involves breaking down the process into individual stages, while also considering how each one fits into a holistic narrative.

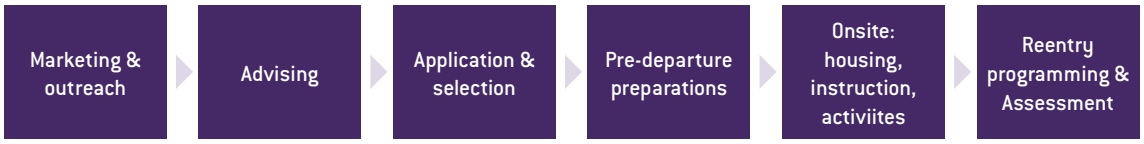

Figure 1: The Education Abroad Process, Author

To close, we explore a few examples of how education abroad can be revamped at different stages of the student journey. Each of these stages could easily fill a chapter, as it does in the upcoming book, and so we are just scratching the surface here. Moreover, the stages noted in Fig. 1 are much simplified, with an understanding that more boxes could be added to the flowchart.

Marketing & Outreach: Many have worked to revise marketing and outreach by ensuring that the images and text in advertisements present a diverse array of students. Just as importantly, and less well documented, is in making sure that messaging reflects a value proposition that speaks to students. Depicting abroad opportunities as "fun" or highlighting images of attractive tourist destinations does little to convince a first-generation university or high-need student, for instance, that going overseas is a worthwhile investment. Instead, depicting students engaged in pre-professional activities and in the types of opportunities that they could not do on their own, while on holiday, is more convincing.

Advising: For those who advise students, Bruckman et al. (forthcoming) note that an appreciative advising model can be a powerful way to flip the script. Based on six stages that each begin with the letter "D" – Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't Settle (Bloom & Martin, 2002) – advisors help students concentrate on their personal goals, preferred outcomes, and ultimately a self-authorship of their futures (Van Velzer & McCullers, 2020). This approach allows those who have been historically marginalised to recognise the strengths that they bring to an overseas experience, thus moving away from a deficiency narrative.

Applications & Selection: Application and selection processes are often viewed as neutral (Welton, Owens, & Zamani-Gallagher, 2018). As Woodman et al. (forthcoming) point out, however, impartiality is a myth, with built-in assumptions that privilege factors such as grades (i.e. marks) and essays, which often do little to demonstrate a student's potential success abroad. Non-native speakers, for example, may have challenges expressing themselves in writing, even if they offer other strengths for international study including bilingualism and the ability to adapt to other cultures. Among many examples, overcoming such biases can be accomplished through opportunities for students to submit video essays and respond to questions that permit them to demonstrate their strengths, not weaknesses.

Pre-departure: Pre-departure includes forms and documents that students need to complete as well as orientations and other sessions designed to prepare students to go abroad. It is important to be mindful of students' finances, understanding, for instance, the difficulties that some will have in paying for a plane ticket in advance. Pre-departure is also a chance to prepare students for their journey, with sessions on intercultural skills that can aid a wide array of students with different identities. It is just as important to ensure that majority students partake in these sessions, understanding that they too have a culture and will need to adapt to new circumstances.

Onsite: Students' onsite experiences include accommodations, courses, and activities if offered. Much will depend on the ability of a sending institution to manage these aspects. Erasmus exchanges, for example, rely more heavily on the host institution, while programmes offered by institutions in the United States are often fully

encompassing, particularly those labeled as "island programmes", with a lot more control over onsite logistics. Whoever is responsible, it is necessary to consider the extent to which all students feel a sense of belonging. Courses and activities will ideally include a chance for students to reflect on their cross-cultural encounters, as well as the challenges they may face in a new place, particularly for those who may feel out of place and/or tokenized due to their identity(ies).

Reentry: Once students have returned, it can often be difficult to track them down. They are quick to reintegrate into the home campus and reestablish themselves among family and friends. However, it is a missed opportunity to not find ways of helping them to connect what they have learned abroad with the rest of their studies. For underrepresented students, much value can be in helping prospective students prepare in going abroad. As Lopez-McGee et al. (forthcoming) note, Howard University's #studyabroadsoblack campaign is one example of how returning students of color have helped to inspire and support others beginning the process.

In this cursory overview, not all these strategies will work in all institutions. What is important is the logic: applying a systemic approach can ensure that we do not focus on one stage alone without forgetting the others. The repetition of key concepts and support mechanisms can likewise ensure that all students, including those who have been historically minoritised, feel fully supported, while also challenging those in the majority to embrace cultural differences. A similar logic can be applied to other related processes such as in the development of new programmes, as well as in the hiring and onboarding of new staff. Without critically examining and revamping our structures, systems, and processes, we are apt to fail at moving the needle in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and thus not deliver on the promises we have made to ourselves, our students, and the field of international education.

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Inclusion in International Higher Education: European Perspectives & Insights *is a new* ***"ACA Think Pieces"*** *series launched in March 2021. Each contribution in this series will explore the multi-faceted nature of inclusion from a different international education perspective, including, for example: concrete advice regarding developing strategic inclusion plans for inclusive higher education mobility, how to measure progress on inclusion-related goals, practical examples of data collection to enhance diversity, synergies of excellent inclusion practices from the Erasmus+ youth sector relevant for higher education, etc. Articles will be authored by expert colleagues in internationalisation of higher education and inclusion, and will be published electronically on ACA's website towards the end of each month from March until the end of 2021.*