

# Sometimes the World Will Break Your Heart: Critical Incident Response and Reflective Learning When Identity-related Challenges are Experienced Abroad



STUDY ABROAD 2019 | OPENING DOORS TO INCREASE DIVERSITY IN STUDY ABROAD

Autumn Tallman, Senior Associate Director, Study Abroad (International HSS)  
Joelle Tolifero, Associate Director of Student Services - Diversity Abroad

# Takeaways

---

**This session will address these issues from a variety of angles:**

1. The perspective of a university critical incident responder for education abroad programs
1. Student testimonials and case studies about how their identity impacted their global experience (video and written)
1. Results from a newly developed Diversity Abroad Climate Survey regarding the experience students have throughout their global education process in relation to their identity



# Walk Away With...

---

1. New information about tools & resources to support returned students
1. A resource handout to support you in preparing for and responding to identity-related critical incidents abroad
1. Connections and perspectives from colleagues in the room!



A nighttime photograph of the New York City skyline, featuring the Manhattan Bridge in the foreground and numerous illuminated skyscrapers in the background. The sky is a deep twilight blue, and the city lights create a vibrant, glowing effect. The bridge's stone structure and suspension cables are visible, and the water of the East River is in the lower foreground.

# Who's in the Room?



# Incident Response Perspective

---

Critical incident management: 10% crisis response, 90% proactive planning

- Realistic expectations
- Accurate risk assessment
- Risk mitigation planning
- Clarity regarding resources and support available from the program provider
- Rapport and trust established with the program provider

Students want to know:

**“What will it be like to be ME when I’m THERE with YOU?”**

# ME - Defining Student Identities

What student identities are we talking about?

Be broad and inclusive in messaging, but specific in planning.

Invite inquiries about any characteristic of identity, anticipated or unanticipated by education abroad staff, that prompts a student to wonder:

**“What will it be like to be ME when I’m THERE with YOU?”**

Do you consider these “Big Three” in *all aspects* of program planning?

- Race and Ethnicity
- LGBTQI+ identities
- Students with disabilities and pre-existing conditions

# THERE - Identity-Based Risk Abroad

Based on salient features of my identity, what are known perceptions, risks and risk mitigation measures for the place I am going?

- DOS Country Information pages with Travel Advisory <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>
- “Travelers with Special Considerations”
- “Local Laws and Special Circumstances”
- “Health”
- “Safety and Security”
- International Insurance Travel Planning Resources?
- Private Security Risk Assessment Resources?
- Diversity Abroad <https://www.diversityabroad.com/>
- Mobility International <https://www.miusa.org/>
- ILGA World <https://ilga.org/>

# YOU - Role of Program Provider

As my program provider or program facilitator, how do you mediate conflicts between ME and THERE?

- Institutional Mission, Values and Code of Conduct  
How do you reconcile institutional values with foreign laws and social norms that may differ? Are your institutional values and human rights commitments transparent? Are they reflected in contract templates and vetting practices?
- Institutional Resources and Processes  
Continuation of care planning? Medical/security evacuation benefits?  
Disability accommodations request process transparent?  
Essential eligibility criteria? Resources and counseling referrals for returnees who experienced an identity-related incident?





# Returnee Mentoring After a Crisis Abroad

<https://dos.uiowa.edu/courses/cmss>

The Critical MASS program is a University of Iowa initiative provided through the Office of the Dean of Students that pairs students with mentors to increase student success and build supportive relationships.



**WHO (taking it back to the “ME”) are  
our students and what are they  
experiencing abroad?**





# What were your most prevalent identities?

---


- “Ethnicity because many people did not consider me American because of how I look and would ask me "where are you actually from?"”
- “Social class because there are things I couldn't afford that my peers could so I missed out on some opportunities to interact with others.”
- “My mental health Abroad was challenged everyday by the people i was surrounded by, I just could not get myself to have the same time that they were having and it created a lot of cognitive dissonance and anxiety.”

# What were your most prevalent identities?

---

- I thought a lot about my nationality and ethnicity, especially when I was in South America. I was able to reconnect with my Hispanic/Caribbean culture to some degree, which is more difficult to find in the Midwest, in my opinion. But my nationality as a US citizen distinguished me from Latinx people around me, so I was also considered a "gringa," especially since I do not speak a fluent Spanish dialect.
- A lot of my personal identities created a barrier when meeting other students and local people in the countries I went to. Some aspects of this included my age, ethnicity & sexual orientation.





**77% of our student participants experienced difficulty related to their identity and 41% felt there were aspects of their identity they felt uncomfortable expressing while abroad**



# Ewan | Italy: Balancing Mental Health Abroad



*“When it came to my ADHD, I struggled immensely”*

# Tabashshum| China: Curiosity rather than fear



# Isaac | Beijing, China: Experienced discrimination in the market





# Adelia | South Africa & Uganda: Being in a majority Black country



# Kyla at The University of Tulsa | Spain: Minority in program and navigating differences



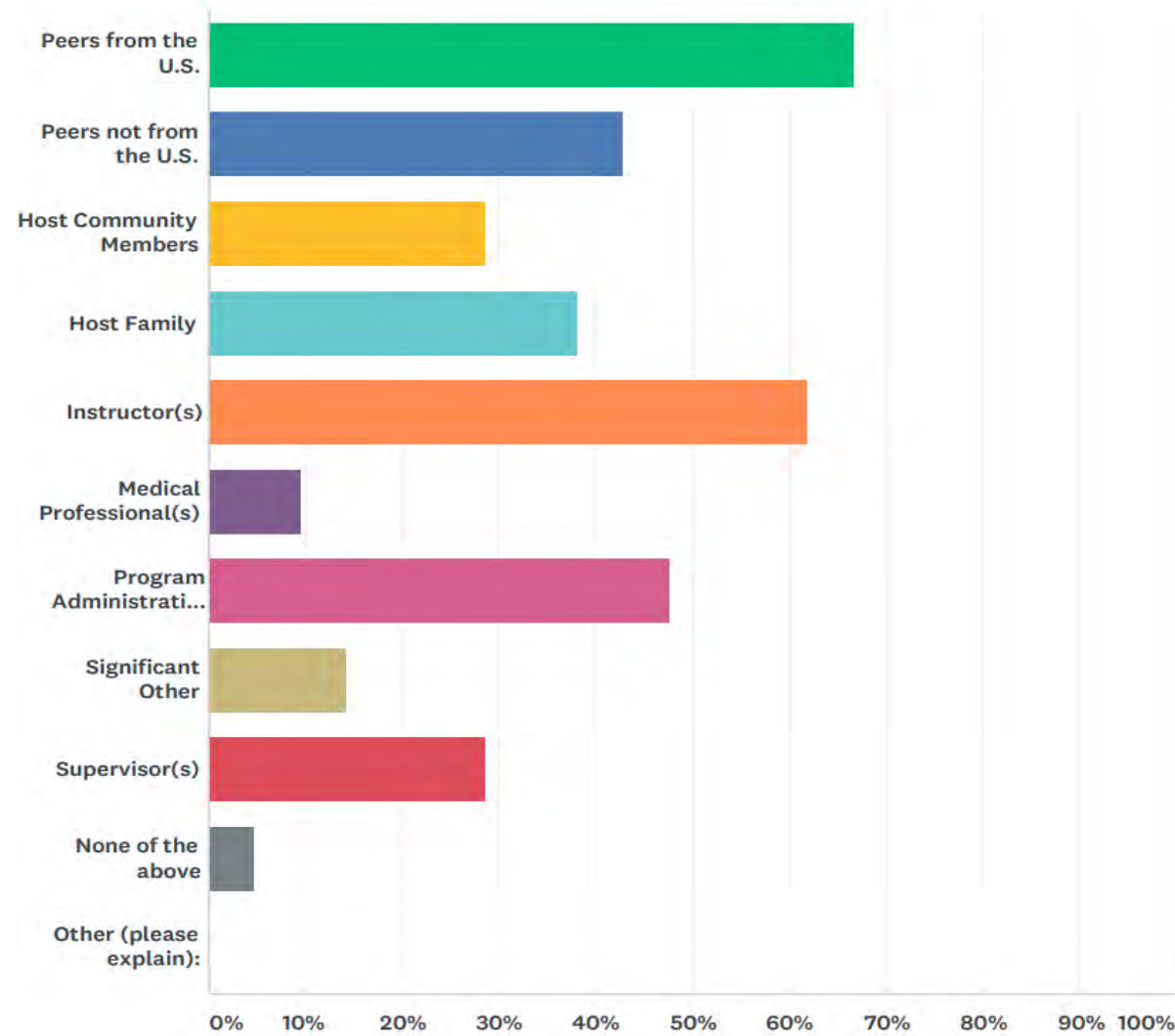
# Minerva at USC| Spain: Native spanish speaker in spanish speaking country





# Q34 What resources in your HOST COUNTRY(IES) did you use to navigate your experience abroad? (Select all that apply.)

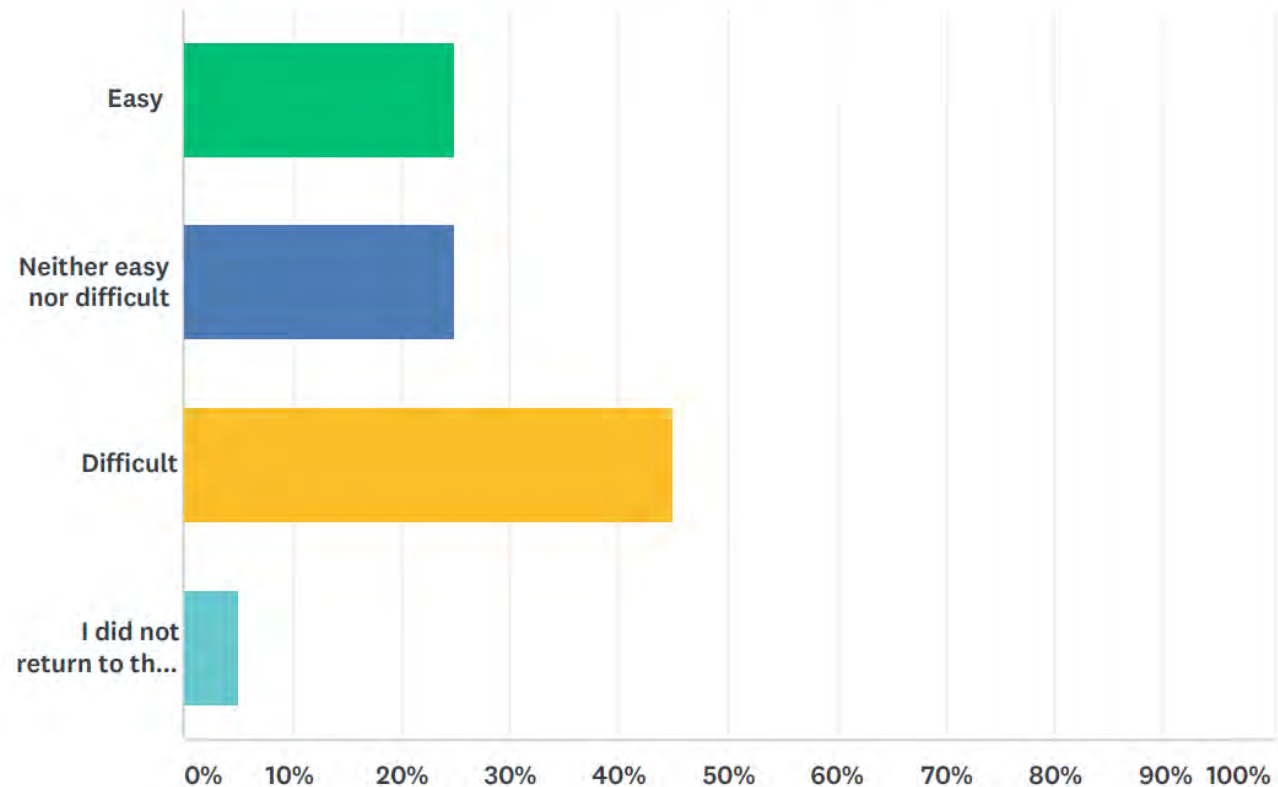
Answered: 21 Skipped: 8



# Re-entry is an area of opportunity

Q37 How would you characterize your re-entry into life in the United States?

Answered: 20 Skipped: 9





90% of our student participants were satisfied with their Study Abroad Experiences despite experiencing difficulties abroad



# To what extent do you agree or disagree that you experienced growth during your education abroad program in the following areas?

## 2019 GSLS Pilot Survey

## SurveyMonkey

Developing self-confidence	0.00% 0	4.76% 1	95.24% 20	0.00% 0	21
Gaining independence	0.00% 0	4.76% 1	90.48% 19	4.76% 1	21
Stepping outside my comfort zone	0.00% 0	4.76% 1	95.24% 20	0.00% 0	21
Gaining knowledge about my host country(ies)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 21	0.00% 0	21
Seeing things from a different perspective	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 21	0.00% 0	21
Adapting to a new cultural environment	0.00% 0	4.76% 1	95.24% 20	0.00% 0	21
Improving my non-native language skills	4.76% 1	14.29% 3	71.43% 15	9.52% 2	21
Communicating in the face of language barriers	0.00% 0	9.52% 2	90.48% 19	0.00% 0	21
Understanding how to apply my skills and interests to a career	4.76% 1	23.81% 5	66.67% 14	4.76% 1	21
Planning my future after graduation	9.52% 2	14.29% 3	71.43% 15	4.76% 1	21

# Resources from Diversity Abroad

- [AIDE Roadmap](#): Maximize your efforts in every aspect of your office so you can be prepared and preventative in your support of diverse students. Assess your level of proficiency in the 9 guidelines of the AIDE Roadmap and receive recommendations from Diversity Abroad on how to improve.
- [Global Student Leadership Summit](#): Support your students reflection and career readiness by nominating a student to attend GSLS. GSLS takes place in conjunction with the Diversity Abroad Conference.
- [Abroad360](#): (Formally Student Advising Courses) Online virtual modules, Diversity and Inclusion Country Guides, and Online workshops to support student learning. Available this winter for subscription.





# CASE STUDIES





1. What would you do to support this student?
2. What resources would you want at your disposal?
3. How might this critical incident influence planning for future programs and advising for future students?





# Questions?





# THANK YOU

**Autumn Tallman, Senior Associate Director, Study Abroad (International HSS)**  
Email: [tallman@uiowa.edu](mailto:tallman@uiowa.edu)

**Joelle Tolifero, Associate Director of Student Services - Diversity Abroad**  
Email: [jtolifero@diversityabroad.org](mailto:jtolifero@diversityabroad.org)

