



Linking Religious Practice and the Study Abroad Experience: Bridging Culture and Understanding

Forum on Education Abroad

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Presenters

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 - SIT Study Abroad
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Religion & Education Abroad: Advising Issues

- Religion is seldom spoken about in U.S.
- Why does it matter?
- Students don't always volunteer information initially.
- Cannot assume someone's religion or degree of faith/practice.
- What do we know as advisers?



Role of the Education Abroad Professional

- Assist student in learning about overseas possibilities.
- Engage student in understanding themselves on variety of levels and how this impacts their choices.
- Support, in a neutral fashion, student's research at their level of understanding.
- Assist student in processing limitations.
- Balance academic and personal needs.



Imagine the Possibilities

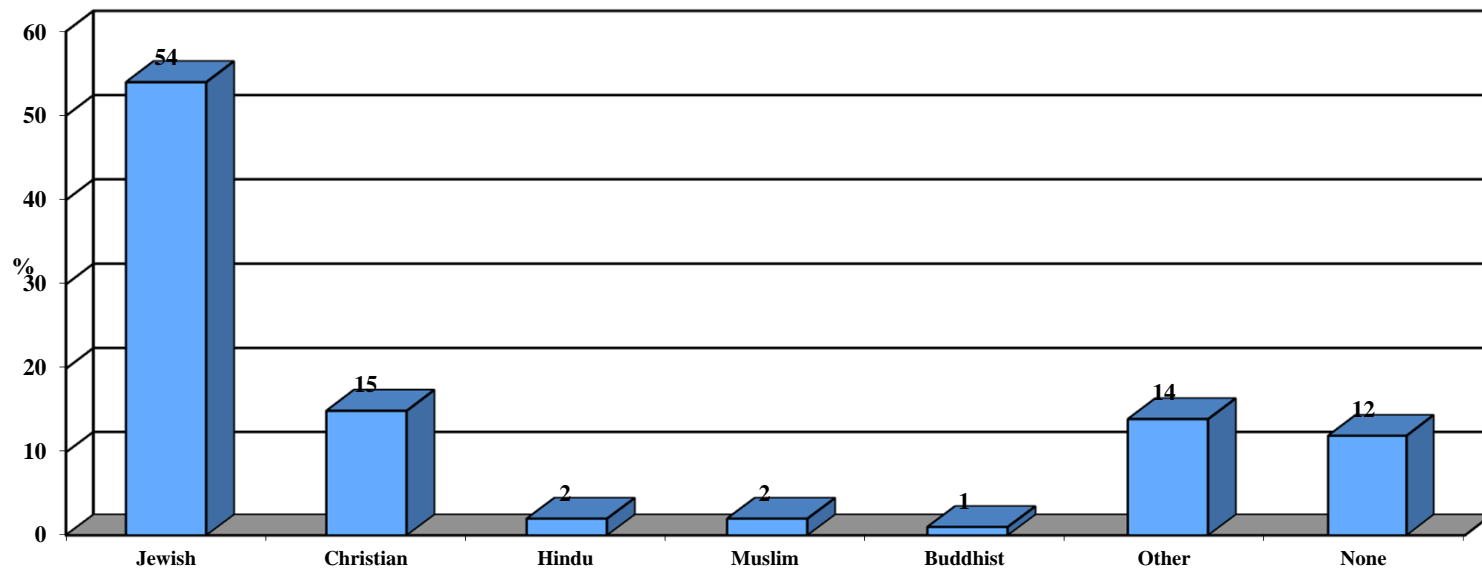
- Programs which focus on religious issues.
- Countries with strong religious identities.
- Being minority v. being majority.
- Reconciling past, engaging in present and future...
- Housing Abroad: to home stay or not to home stay... What does it mean for me?



Religious Limitations Abroad

- Access to communities of faith
- Access to places of worship (regular and holidays)
- Majority/minority relations in country
- Openness, flexibility and respect for difference
- Public vs. private sphere...what to share, when, where, etc.
- Being yourself abroad

Brandeis University Religious Diversity





Brandeis University Case Study

- Campus climate and issues of support
- Academic departments (Religious Studies, Near Eastern and Judaic Studies)
- Non-Western and Comparative Culture requirement (Israel not included)
- Religious Groups on Campus: Chaplaincy/Hillel, etc.



Advising Resources on Religion

- Where do you find resources for students?
 - Academic Departments
 - Websites
 - Program Providers
 - Resident Directors
 - Local communities of faith with overseas connections
 - Student Evaluations
 - Alumnae Abroad
- How do we build on our resources?
 - Diversity Abroad
 - Committee on Underrepresentation in Education Abroad
 - Student Evaluations
 - Others...




Secular U.S. Students Abroad & Religion

- **Concepts**
 - Leap of faith
 - Symbolic v. literal
 - Myths and elements of truth
 - American belief system as comparison
- **Religion as guiding principles of life decisions**




New York University

- Large university which runs own study away programs at 11 study away sites and 3 portal campuses around the world
 - Study abroad students, Open Doors, 2011-12: 4,378
 - International students, Open Doors, 2011-12: 9,362
- Students from wide range of religious backgrounds



Religious observance and spirituality opportunities at NYU study away sites seen as program/service ideally comparable to portal campus

- Center for Spiritual Life
 - Mindfulness Project
 - ‘Of Many’ Institute for Multifaith Leadership
 - Faithzone Trainings
- On-site prayer space when possible at study away sites
- Access to local resources



Provost letter each semester to portal campus faculty and staff shared with global programs staff about religious observance at start of term

- Sample language from letter:

To: Deans and Department Chairs Date: 8/01/2013

From: David W. McLaughlin, Provost

Subject: Students' Religious Observance and Class Attendance

As a nonsectarian, inclusive institution, NYU policy permits members of any religious group to absent themselves from classes without penalty when required for compliance with their religious obligations. The policy and principles to be followed by students and faculty may be found here: [The University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#).

This autumn is a time of important religious observance for many of our students. The following Jewish holidays take place during September, and begin at sundown the night before the first calendar day of the holiday: Rosh Hashana, September 5-6; Yom Kippur, September 14; and, Sukkoth and Simchat Torah, September 19-27 (with the primary obligation days being September 19-20 and 26-27). The Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha is on October 14-15.

Some students may miss a significant amount of class at the start of the semester, as they choose to observe some or all the holidays. It has come to my attention that notwithstanding the University's supportive approach to these matters, some students feel uncomfortable alerting their professors to upcoming absences related to religious observance. As we plan for the new semester, please bring the holiday schedule to the attention of your faculty and keep it in mind when scheduling academic events and exams. I thank you for your continued assistance in creating an atmosphere of understanding and accommodation in response to our students' commitment to religious observance.

- Highlights unique conflicts (i.e. Shavuot on finals)
- Provide access to chaplain staff who can help answer very specific questions (i.e. how much time is reasonable to get ready before a holiday begins at sundown.)

Rabbi letter to students through Hillel about religious observance and course planning during prior semester

- Sample language from letter:

Edgar M. Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life

Division of Student Affairs
7 East 10th Street
New York, New York 10003
Telephone: 212 998 4120
Facsimile: 212 995 4774
rabbi.sarna@nyu.edu

Rabbi Yehuda Sarna *Executive Director and University Chaplain*

June 3, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

A signature opportunity NYU offers is the diverse options of study away experiences. As NYU increasingly becomes a Global Network University, this opportunity is joined to new challenges.

One such challenge is the ability of students to observe religious holidays in a manner consistent with their beliefs and practices. Not every study away site will have access to familiar service, kosher holiday meals, and a lively community. We at the Bronfman Center actively work with each campus to help students identify resources, while understanding the inherent limitations involved. Nevertheless, students may feel that the best way for them to celebrate is to travel to a different locale for the holiday.

In such cases, students must be aware **prior to the semester** that only religious holiday, **not travel days**, are considered excused absences. Students should consider this policy, which we at the Bronfman Center support, when making class selections.

On a different note, I actively encourage students to engage with the rich religious history and diverse communities represented in and around the global sites. We would be happy to serve as a resources for students looking to access such opportunities.

Please feel free to contact me with any concerns. Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Rabbi Yehuda Sarna
University Chaplain, New York University
Skirball Executive Director
The Edgar M. Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life at NYU

Hillel manual with information about each site for students to consult as planning

- Sample Bronfman Global Guide excerpt:

Florence

Provisions

Full kitchen, excluding housing at Villa

Meal Plan

Yes, cold salad bar option

Homestay

Optional, NYU can make kosher arrangements

Some Local Kosher Establishments

Ruth's Kosher Vegetarian Restaurant – Address: Via Farini 2, Phone: 055.2480888,

www.kosheruth.com

Some Local Heritage Sites

Sites:

The Great Synagogue and Museum of Florence - Via Farini 6, 50121, Florence, Phone: +39 055 245252

Synagogues:

The Great Synagogue of Florence - Via Farini 6, 50121, Florence

At NYU, students have the opportunity to travel abroad to study at various NYU global sites. The Bronfman Center is proud that so many of its students take advantage of this enriching opportunity. Traveling exposes students to a variety of cultures, languages, traditions, foods, and landscapes. The Bronfman Center sees the NYU study abroad program as an opportunity for students to explore Jewish heritage from a global perspective- to learn the history and practices of the local community, and ultimately to enrich students' worldview of the Jewish people and humanity. Included below is information to help students interact with Jewish communities at each NYU global site.

Bon Voyage ! נסיעה טובה

- **Sample Bronfman Global Guide excerpt cont'd:**

Buenos Aires

Provisions

Full kitchen (no stove)

Meal Plan

Yes

Homestay

Yes, NYU can make kosher arrangements

Some Local Kosher Establishments

Aieka – Address: Bartolomé Mitre 4390, Phone 4982- 9662

El Jaial – Address: Tucumán 2620, Phone: 4961-0541

Lev Tov – Address: Paso 745, Phone 4962-0857

Luba Cafe – Address: Ayacucho 1412, Phone 4805-2253

Masliah – Address: Jean Jaures 896, Phone 5292-5100

Mc Donalds's Kosher – Address: Av. Corrientes 3247 (Abasto Shopping Center – Food Square), Phone: 4959-3709

Parrilla Al Galope – Address: Tucuman 2637, Phone: 4963-6888

Pizza Romini – Address: Tucuman 2802, Phone: 4962-5097

Pizza Sultani – Address: San Luis 2601, Phone: 4961-3913

Restaurant Asian – Address: Av. Córdoba 5288 - Palermo District - 1st level, Phone: 4116-5507/3399

Restaurant El Pasaje –Address: Pasaje El Lazo 3141, Phone: 4806-0084

Sucath David – Address: Tucuman 2349, Phone: 4952-8878

Sulam – Address: Helguera 474 1st floor, Phone: 4611-4746

Sushi Go – Address: Av. Pueyrredón 2501 Local 1009/10 - Terrazas Buenos Aires Design, Phone: 5777-6110

Some Local Heritage Sites

Sites:

Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) – Address: Pasteur 633Once, Phone : 4959-8800

Buenos Aires Holocaust Museum – Address: Montevideo 919, Recoleta, Phone: 4811 3588

Gran Templo Paso – Address: Paso 423, Phone: 4951 2306

Plaza Embajada de Israel (Memorial Plaza) – Address: Arroyo and Suipacha Streets, Bronfman Global Guide pg. 5

Recoleta

Jewish Museum of Buenos Aires – Address: Libertad 769, El Centro

Synagogues:

Menora Center – Address: Cabello 3206, Phone: 11-4800-1200, <http://www.menora.org.ar/menora-center/>

Sucath David – Address: Tucuman 2750, CP 1189, <http://www.judaicasite.com/>

Yeshurun Temple – Address: Republica de La India 3035, Phone: 5411-4802-9310

Gran Templo Paso – Address: Paso 423, Phone: 5411-4951-2306, <http://www.grantemplopasso.org.ar/>

CIRA (Congregacion Israelita de la Republica Argentina) – Address: Libertad 769, <http://www.templolibertad.org.ar/english.html>

Yesod Hadat – Address: La Valle 2249 Once, Phone: 4961-9299



Study away site information at orientation

Information in syllabi

- Sample language from syllabus:

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their professor and the Office of Academic Support in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

- These appear on website even as students are exploring where they want to study away.

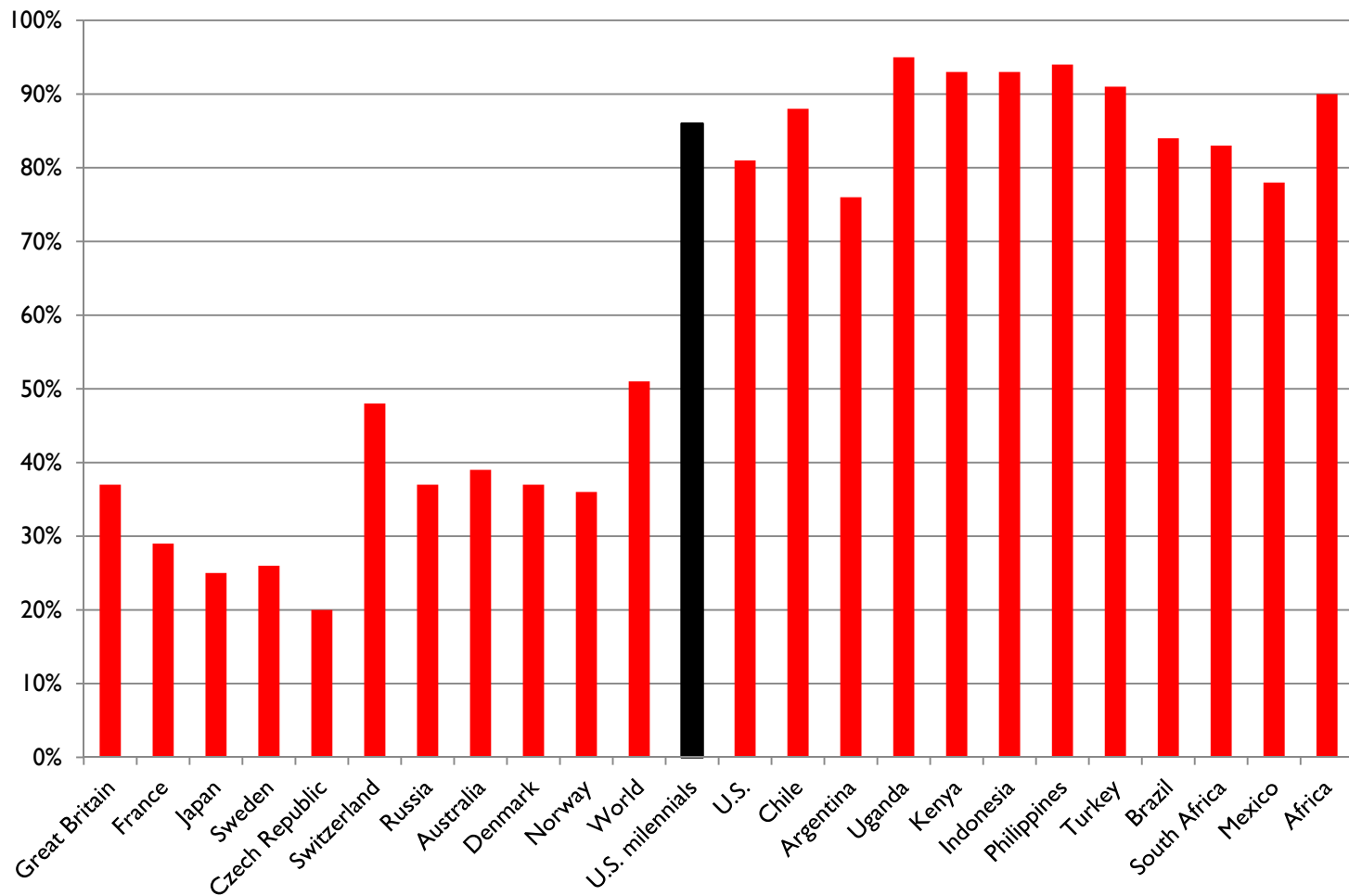


Millennials and Religion

- 29% religiously unaffiliated
- 36% self-identify as religious
- 86% believe in G-d

(Pew Global Attitudes Project 2014)

% population believe in G-d



Christian Post 4/26/11; National Opinion Research Council 2008; Washington Times 4/16/10



Commonalities and Homestay Family Perspectives

- Belief in G-d = Religious
- Belief in G-d = Certain conduct
- Breakdown
- U.S. stereotypes



Commonalities and Homestay Family Perspectives

- What does this have to do with linking religious practice and study abroad?
- Deconstructing
- How?



Family preparation: preparing families to receive students openly

- Social activities with nationals who have experienced or studied in the U.S.
- Movie night and debrief
- Role play and role reversal
- Returned students
- Funny stories and play out
- Case studies and scenarios
- Pairing veterans and newcomers



SIT Process for Students with Special Religious Requests

1. Reception of request (the earlier the better)
2. Identify potential programs
3. Identify possible obstacles if particular program is specified
4. Local staff discussions
5. Development of proposal of options
6. Present options to school/student



SIT Process for Students with Special Religious Requests

7. Appropriate homestay family assignment
8. Establish contact with place of worship: permission, requirements, paperwork, etc.
9. First contacts upon student arrival, accompaniment
10. Follow-up/checking up
11. Troubleshoot
12. Time away for worship – potential to work into the curriculum



SIT Take-Aways

- The profile of millennials is unique.
- We consider it crucial to prepare and integrate our host families into the intercultural milieu.
- SIT seeks to go above and beyond in meeting our students' religious needs.



Conclusions

- International and study abroad alumnae are an often under-utilized resource abroad and in U.S.
- Potential for increasing cross-cultural understanding from viewing own religion from different perspective.
- Potential impact of practicing own religion while abroad is significant.



Case Study A

- Paul goes to see Michelle, the academic coordinator on his study abroad program in a major European city to discuss his upcoming absences for the Passover holiday which begins Monday night. He says he will miss class from Monday night through the following Wednesday as he will be away observing the holiday. He wants to make sure his entire absence will be excused since he will be out for religious observance and the syllabus states that absences for religious observance are excused. Michelle is confused since the communication from the provost about absence for religious observance states the excused dates for Passover are Monday night to Wednesday night and then Sunday night to Tuesday night the following week.
- Although, denied the excused absence for the intermediate days of Passover, Paul goes away, and does not turn in assignments due on the intermediate days of the holiday. Instead he turns in the assignments late and when he gets them back with a grade deduction, he comes back to see Michelle, the academic coordinator to discuss his unfair treatment and questions why his attendance should matter given that at his home campus no one ever took attendance and he was free to observe according to his wishes.
- How could Michelle handle the situation?



Case Study B

- Caroline is a Middle Eastern Studies major studying abroad in Jerusalem. During orientation she realizes her mandatory Hebrew class begins on Sunday morning when she regularly goes to church. She seeks out Matthew, the student life coordinator and Alyssa, the academic life coordinator, to explain she cannot attend class on Sunday mornings as it violates her religious practice.
- How could Matthew and Alyssa handle the situation?
- What, if anything, should the home school adviser have done prior to departure?



Case Study C

- In xyzland, program staff have completed the planning and scheduling stages of the semester itinerary. All professors, homestay families, hotels, facilities, transportation, and food is set for the next 15 weeks. Staff are hosting a luncheon with the homestay families and handing out the semester calendar. As they are going over the calendar together, one of the beloved host mothers raises her hand and says to the director, “There is an error here. There are classes planned for the students on Holy Thursday. That can’t be.” The other host mothers join, in a rumble, in the objection. It turns out the classes planned for that day are with an eminent scholar who only had that day available to teach, and the program had reserved his time months in advance.
- What are the staff to do?

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Questions & Answers