HELPING STUDENTS NAVIGATE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WHILE ABOARD: DISCUSSING THE CURRENT U.S. POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Helen Newman, NYU
Kristina Byrne Gallagher, Pace
Rebecca James, CEA
DISCLAIMER

This presentation is not political in nature; we are not representing or asserting institution/organizational or personal political views. Rather we hope this serves as a reminder for those operating in the Education Abroad space how critical it is to remain current, informed and continue to evolve our programs so the stated [and unstated] student needs are addressed.
Agenda

Audience Demographics- Who’s in the room?
Pre-Departure and On-Site Orientations
  What is covered?
  What is not being discussed?
Student Voices
Informal Survey Results
Strategies, Techniques and Resources
Media Literacy and Intercultural Awareness
Scenarios
Q&A
Additional Resources
Phones, please! 😊
Do you conduct a pre-departure orientation?

Yes

No
How much time is dedicated to pre-departure orientation?

1-3 days or more

1/2 - 1 day

A few hours

1 hour or less
What topics are covered in pre-departure orientation?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Duration</th>
<th>Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3 days</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 day - 1 day</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few hours</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 hour or less</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What topics are covered during on-site orientation?
WHAT’S MISSING?
When I left for Europe two months ago, I thought I was leaving behind the suffocating election rhetoric. Admittedly, I was relieved. How wrong I was. I am still inundated by American politics—daily. As an illustration of this point, take this *selection* of situations in which Europeans have eagerly launched into discussions of Donald Trump. In *every single* case, these were people confused and horrified by the rise of Donald Trump.
1. My taxi driver a few weeks ago, who immigrated to Berlin from the Middle East many years ago.

2. A British guy who bought me a beer at a ruin bar in Budapest.

3. Two Israeli tourists who needed directions to the Jewish Museum.

4. My host mom (all the time).

5. My German professors (all the time).

6. A German man who owns a local business near my school.

7. Two German tourists on the U-Bahn who I started talking to because they were wearing American baseball caps.

That’s only seven but I could go on indefinitely.
Every time I open my mouth in Ireland, somebody asks me about Donald Trump. My American accent gives me away, and everyone from curious taxi drivers and bartenders to the person sitting at the next table at Starbucks want to hear what I have to say about the new president.

Jack Rooney / Study Abroad: Ireland

I also kind of feel even more aware of every decision that our government makes, not necessarily that I’m more informed about the decisions, but that as an American in a foreign country, I now represent the U.S. to whomever I meet. I almost sometimes feel the need to be more apologetic about the actions my country is taking, though I have almost nothing to do with any of the decisions.

Lauren Meandro / Study Abroad: Germany
During his time in Paris, Adamek was often approached and questioned about how the Trump victory unfolded, with many hoping to prevent a similar scenario in France. Thus, despite living abroad, Adamek felt connected to the political climate of the U.S. through a similar rise of right-wing nationalism within France.

Dan Adamek / Study Abroad: France

“We went from talking about Taylor Swift to politics and she asked me about the president and what I thought about him… She later asked if the US is going to bomb Peru just like it had bombed Syria,” she said. An encounter with a 9 year old girl in a local museum.

Julia Englebert / Study Abroad: Peru
2018 Student Voices

Informal Student Survey

- 120 responses from students who studied abroad, most in 2017
- Undergraduates
- Pace University, CEA Study Abroad and SIT Study Abroad alumni
1) People are curious. We need to engage. I could not go into an Uber without getting questions asked about Trump!
2) It was eye-opening to hear about U.S. politics from an international perspective. Nobody was rude to me, but it's important to keep in mind that people in other countries have preconceptions of American politics.
3) Hearing others opinions and knowledge allows you to better understand what you stand for or what others stand for. Also I learned a lot about important issues that I never thought much about.
4) Studying abroad forced me to look at US politics in a global perspective, as well as to reflect on US policies from the perspective of a nation that has very different policies and social ideas.
5) I think it’s important students know that they will likely be approached by strangers and asked about their political opinions. It was something that surprised me and for which I had wish I had been made more aware
6) It's crucial to have as much knowledge as possible about domestic (US) politics before going abroad! It definitely helps in navigating interactions with the locals abroad and in better understanding the differences and similarities between the US and the host culture.
7) Not many people abroad enjoy the US political system as of late. ...US politics is affecting other countries economically and socially - when I was abroad and went to several different countries, every time I asked someone how they felt about what was happening in the US, every single one said they were scared. To them it didn't necessarily matter who got elected, but more of how Americans treat our own election, slandering our own government - it affects them a lot more than the American public realizes. Our instability is rippling over the world and no one knows it. Social Media has ruined the trust between countries and it is socially tearing people apart.
How often did you discuss U.S. politics with family, friends or classmates?
Prior to departure, did your institution/program provider address the topic of U.S. politics in the pre-departure orientation?

If your institution / program providers did not discuss U.S. politics while living abroad do you think they should have?
Strategies for Navigating Difficult Conversations

**P**ause

**T**hink

**A**cknowledge

**R**eframe (pivoting)

**R**espond (redirecting)

Source: Olivia Worden - Pace University Diversity Trainer/Faculty
Make it Practical:

1. Is it temporary? How temporary?

2. Know your weaknesses with people and situations

3. Build awareness: triggers, body language

4. Avoid your *Danger Zone*
Politely Disengage

Always an option

Your Choice

Situational
Thoughtfully Engage

Let the speaker feel heard:
1. Thank you for that, that’s a lot to think about.
2. never thought about it like that before.
3. I hear what you’re saying.
4. I’m so glad you asked about X!
5. Paraphrase: so what you are saying is …

Acknowledge with questions:
1. Tell me more about X, what is the impact to [host country] regarding U.S. politics?
2. You sound very passionate about X, what makes this so important for you?
3. How would X country handle it?
1. Have you visited the U.S.? What was your experience? Where did you go?

2. How are you handling [ insert something political happening in host country or region ]?
   
   A. What do you think about the recent elections in Italy or Russia?
   B. What are your thoughts about no presidential term limits in China?
   C. What impact, if any do you think Brexit will have here?

3. I’m thinking of going to X what’s the best time to go?
The Art of Pivoting
76 out of 120 respondents indicated some type of social media

65% reported their main source of news DID NOT change while abroad
Personal Inventory:

- Travel Wise Quiz (Pace University’s Handout)
- Truity

Cultural Assessment Tools:

- World Citizen Guide
- Globally Competent Aptitude Assessment
- GlobeSmart by Aperian Global
- Living Abroad - Culture Coach
- Culture Compass by Hofstede Insights
Increasing Cultural Awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spectrum of Core Values</th>
<th>Collectivism:</th>
<th>Person Centered:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualism:</td>
<td>The group and their collective ability to attain their goals together is most important. Individual uniqueness is discouraged. Privacy may be perceived as loneliness or isolation.</td>
<td>Focus on relationships/ being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Centered:</td>
<td>Focus on activity/ doing/ efficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informality:</td>
<td>Formality:</td>
<td>Respect for age and status is most important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change:</td>
<td>Tradition:</td>
<td>Past/ History oriented; respect for the way things have always been done. Stability is valued; change is perceived as disruptive and to be avoided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality:</td>
<td>Hierarchy:</td>
<td>Some people have a higher status than others. Respecting that creates security and certainty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Communication:</td>
<td>Indirect Communication:</td>
<td>Harmony is important – don’t let anyone lose face alone or in front of others – meaning is implied. A 3rd person may be used to convey information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Gender Roles:</td>
<td>Flexible Gender Roles:</td>
<td>Men and women cultivate both masculine and feminine traits there are no expectations based on gender.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On-Campus Resources

Study Abroad Peer Advisors / Global Student Ambassadors
Residence Life
Multicultural Center (Diversity & Inclusion)
Mental Health and Wellness
Academic Departs: Psychology, History, Anthropology, Management
Human Resources
Alumni Affairs
Scenarios
Scenario 1

The student is seated in the airplane for their departure flight. The passenger next to them begins to make general small talk about flying into Madrid. Has the student been to Spain before? What will they be doing there? Where does the student goes to school? The student discovers the passenger has a son one grade level above who actually attends the same institution the student will be studying at during the academic year.

What begins politely enough about travel to Spain slow turns to other topics. The student continues engaging, but during the course of the flight it becomes evident that the two passengers feel differently about immigration matters in the US.

1. What are some techniques the student could use to move the conversation away from US immigration policy and back to Spain?

2. How can the student disengage from the dialogue politely, but also attempt to retain this potential contact and connection to son who will be attending the same school?
Scenario 2

Four students from the Midwest – two male and two female, all from the same home university – opt for co-ed housing in an apartment in Rome. The two male students are “loud and proud” Trump supporters who often wear their MAGA hats (inside the apartment). The two female students are more liberal and express interest to the program staff about wanting to attend the local Women’s March.

Several weeks into the term, the female students overhear what they deem to be “racist comments” made by the two young men and approach the program staff about the situation.

1. How could the on-site staff handle this?
2. What tips and communication strategies could they provide the two female students?
3. Should the on-site staff intervene? If so, how?
4. Why or why not?
Scenario 3

November 2017

US student is studying in London and is meeting up with some classmates to finish group work before their in-class presentation the following week. As the US student arrives, she hears her classmates saying, “there goes Trump, again”. Not knowing what specific event(s) occurred, the student pulled up her Twitter account and reads the latest regarding a series of videos retweeted by Trump. The videos re-posted were originally from Jayda Fransen of Britain First (the far-right, ultranationalist group). Her British classmates ask her how can the President of the US be such an idiot? How did the American people allow him to be elected?

1. How can the student respond to her British classmates and possibly de-escalate the conversation?

2. What questions can she ask about the UK to change the topic, but stay connected?

3. Does Media Literacy influence the situation and if so how?
Questions?
Difficult Conversation Resources

CUNY Queens College - Handbook for Facilitating Difficult Conversations in Classroom

Ohio State HR - Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most (summary of book by Stone, Patton and Heen)


University of Minnesota – Graduate & Professional Student Advising


Additional Resources

Education Abroad Professional Associations / Organizations:
- Over 30 Professional Associations
- US DOS: USA Study Abroad Toolbox

Media Literacy:
- Media Literacy Project
- Media Literacy.Org

Code Switching:
- NPR Blog
- How Code Switching Explains the World
- 5 Reasons Why People Code Switch
THANK YOU!