We’re So Vain, We Probably Think This Program Is About Us

Decolonizing Study Abroad

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Characteristics of Colonial Education

• Devaluation of indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production

• Imposition of colonial power’s administrative systems, infrastructure, rules

• Imposition of colonial power’s belief systems, values, and ways of being

• Replacing indigenous languages with colonial power’s language

Beloit College, est. 1846 on land previously occupied by indigenous peoples
What is U.S. Study Abroad for?

• Develop students as learners
• Preparation for positive & ethical contribution to society
• *through* Meaningful and respectful engagement with academic, social, and cultural differences
• *by* Shifting and enlarging their perspectives
• *and* Becoming both more humble and empowered
Undermined by Neocolonial Practices

Three Examples:

Students positioned as tourists and adventurers

Policies, practices, attitudes resulting in uneven participation

Lip-service to reciprocity
Session Plan

1. Questions for Study Abroad Offices: Messaging, Preparing and Positioning Students

2. Decolonizing Evaluation to Include Local Partners

3. Decolonizing Program Design
Competing demands: The study abroad professional

- Educator – helping position students to learn
- Risk Manager
- Marketer
- Purchaser / Outsourcer
- Customer Relations Manager
What Study Abroad Offices Can Do

Messaging through images and texts

Preparing and Positioning Students as Learners
- Outside the classroom abroad
- Inside the classroom abroad
How do these photos depict the relationships of local residents with the students?

Which photo is easier to understand? What are the photos limitations?
What messages is the poster conveying about study abroad?

What story is it telling about the relationship between the student and the people she has met in her study abroad site?

What changes might you suggest from a decolonizing perspective?
How does the poster on the right retell the story?

What does the poster ‘sacrifice’ to retell the story?

What are the implications for us as we (and our students) use images and text to send messages about study abroad?
## Learning in unstructured settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neocolonial Approaches</th>
<th>Decolonizing Approaches</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncritically promotes study abroad as immersion; neglects potential impacts on people and place in the study abroad site when students are unprepared for immersion</td>
<td>Recognizes the challenges of engaging with people and place abroad, particularly when there is a language barrier; helps students do this ethically and self-critically.</td>
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**Discussion Prompt:**

How can we help students learn in unstructured settings abroad, and to do so in an ethical manner?
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pedagogy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sees the home institution’s approach to pedagogy as normative</td>
<td>Respects and learns from differences in approaches to pedagogy</td>
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**Discussion Prompt:**

Recognizing that educational differences exist, how do we prepare students to navigate divergent approaches and support them in doing so?
4 Steps for Decolonizing Study Abroad Office Practices

1. Apply a decolonizing lens to messaging about study abroad
   - Students as learners
   - Local institutions, scholars, and residents as teachers

2. Critique “immersion” to recognize and prepare students for its challenges, including questions around power and privilege

3. Respect educational differences and prepare students to anticipate and navigate them, and to learn from them

4. Use our power and privilege to take steps to decolonize study abroad
Decolonizing Evaluation

Taking Stock of Current Methods and Finding Ways to Include Host Community Partners
Pair Share (5 minutes per partner = 10 minutes total)

• Do you currently evaluate your education abroad programs?

• What are your evaluative measures or instruments?

• Who administers the evaluation(s)?

• What program elements are evaluated? By what methods?

• Whose learning is evaluated and how?

• How do you utilize the evaluate data you collect? Do you share it with anyone?
## Typical Education Abroad Evaluation Approaches

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Evaluation Targets</th>
<th>Critical Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student (Customer) Satisfaction</td>
<td>Did on-site partners make you feel comfortable? Were things easy for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning – Academic and/or Intercultural</td>
<td>Centers student learning (important) but what about the learning of others? Was there an exchange of learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Teaching</td>
<td>Were faculty the only teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Program Reflections</td>
<td>Do we know how on-site partners feel things went on the program?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Making Room for Inclusion

• We don’t have to de-center student learning or faculty teaching to make room at the center for the inclusion of others’ evaluative perspectives cultural exchange

• If we take seriously the idea of cultural exchange we must make our approach to evaluation bi-lateral
Defining On-Site Partners Broadly

• On-site partners come in different forms based on program type, this informs their role in the evaluation process
  • What program assessment or evaluation might your partners already be doing?

• Different strategies are appropriate for different partner types
  • Example: community-based international service learning vs. semester exchange at a university
## Case Study: Turning the Evaluative Lens

<table>
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<tr>
<th>On-site Partner Question Themes</th>
<th>Response Themes</th>
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</table>
| What are US-based students learning and where are they learning it? | • “How to be part of a family” (Host mom)  
• “That they can’t buy an A here” (Professor)  
• “That we will cater to them” (Study Abroad Admin) |
| What role do you play in the educative process?                     | • “I teach them how to use collones” (Cafeteria worker)  
• “How to be independent” (Host mom)  
• “How to speak Spanish” (Professor) |
| What have you learned through the process of working with US-based students? | • “The USA is a very diverse place” (Many)  
• “Not all US students are rich” (Many)  
• “They aren’t as well educated as Costa Ricans” (Professor) |
| What motivates you to work with US-based students?                  | • “Extra income” (Host mom)  
• “Chance to practice my English” (Study Abroad Admin)  
• “I don’t have a choice” (University employee) |
Six Small Steps to Decolonizing Your Evaluation

1. If you do not currently engage in program evaluation, make this a priority.
2. Ask your on-site partners if they engage in any evaluation – if so, ask if they are willing to share their findings.
3. Read your current evaluation instrument with a critical eye – ask whose learning/teaching is centered, and how you might make room for other perspectives.
4. Ask if your current evaluation is reflective of your program goal to increase mutual understanding and/or intercultural exchange.
5. Make time to work with on-site partners on developing ways to assess and evaluate the mutuality of your relationship.
6. Do something with the data you collect! Share it with partners, use it not just to improve program logistics, but to evolve your partner relationships.
Decolonizing Study Abroad: Program Design
Neocolonial Program Design

- Treats site as a laboratory for learning
  - Objectifies and depersonalizes people, elements of the culture, etc.
  - The culture is treated like a museum display rather than a living system
- Treats site like a shopping trip or a tourist holiday
  - Program is planned as a checklist of things to see and do without considering context, local perspectives, or what local residents might think is important
Neocolonial Program Design

• Fetishizes ‘authenticity’
  • Sites visited, and their cultural contexts, imagined as static (stuck in time, homogenous) and exotic (with differences from the home culture overly emphasized)

• Employs traditional ethnographic approaches
  • The observer is imagined as an objective outsider with no ‘lens’ or biases
  • The difficulty of really understanding another cultural context is not acknowledged
Neocolonial Program Design

• Centers the visitor as the main agent of global activity
  • Fails to use a critical, self-reflective stance
  • Fails to allow for local viewpoints to be centered as well
  • Study abroad is something that ‘we’ do while ‘they’ are like the extras in our narratives
  • ‘We’ are global and ‘they’ are local
  • Fosters uncritical acknowledgment of privilege (‘Gosh, we’re so privileged to be from our country’) and the ‘savior complex’
Neocolonial Program Design

• Homogenous groups encounter exotic Others
  • The exotification of local residents is exacerbated when traveling groups are themselves largely homogenous.
    • Our lack of diversity creates an all-too-easy sense of profound and utter difference.
  • Local residents are also encouraged to see ours as a homogenous culture
  • We fail to recognize the profound diversity within both our own cultures and those that we are visiting
Decolonizing Approach: Reciprocal Design

• Local partners:
  • help to create and conceive of the program
  • participate in planning and decision-making
  • help shape the curricula
• Incorporates local ideas about how the course topics are relevant in the location(s) visited
• Constant, iterative process that is labor-intensive but very rewarding
Decolonizing Approach: Redefining the learning community

• Dispenses with the usual assumption that faculty and students are the home campus

• Local students and community members are invited into the learning community to participate fully.

• Participants learn with and from each other – the learning is truly intercultural
Decolonizing Approach: Bilateral mobility

• Programs are not unidirectional.
• Faculty-led group may travel to the host location(s), but there are also opportunities for local folks to travel to the institution’s home location.
• Not necessarily parallel mobility: Perhaps the ‘return’ direction is targeted to local program faculty/leaders
• Or perhaps the on-site community sends exchange students to the home campus
Scenarios

• Short scenarios have been provided on your table top.
• Please review and discuss with your table mates. How can we best handle the challenge while following a decolonizing ethos?
• Be prepared to share ideas or observations with the full group, as time allows.
Five Steps to Decolonizing Your Program Design

1. Work with local partners to create, conceive of, and plan for the program.
2. Re-engage with your partners continuously from one planning cycle to another. The process is iterative and takes practice.
3. Work toward less homogenous groups – both from the home campus and in the local participants who are involved. Whenever possible, draw attention to the complexities of identities so that simple ‘us’/‘them’ dichotomies are deflated.
4. Expand your notion of the learning community to include both the faculty member(s) and students from your home campus as well as local experts and local learners.
5. Find ways to ensure that your programs have bilateral mobility, whether that involves local faculty, local students, or others visiting the home campus.
Slides, decolonizing graphic, & a selected bibliography to be available on the Forum conference website following the conference

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