



Top Tips: Outreach, Marketing, & Recruitment for First-Generation College Students at MSI's

Despite the progress which has been made to diversify student and professional participation in the field of education abroad, reaching first generation college students—which can often be found in greater populations at minority serving institutions (MSI's)—continues to be a challenge. These unique individuals are entering a system which for them may feel like a foreign experience in and of itself; rocking the boat through studying abroad may have little appeal or seem completely unattainable. It can be an overwhelming task for any institution much less study abroad office to aggressively recruit first generation students for programming. However, there things which can be done on a small scale, especially in offices with limited resources, which have impactful results. Here are five simple tips which MSI's can employ today to ensure their marketing and recruiting efforts are inclusive of first generation students:

1

Revisit using the phrase, “Do you want to study abroad?” Think about all of the times you have been asked if you understand a concept or question which makes absolutely no sense to you. Even as a seasoned professional, it is at times easier to feign comprehension or change the subject to avoid looking like a fool. Now, consider the novice student who is entering a totally unfamiliar system—where perhaps English is not their primary language—being constantly bombarded by concepts and phrases which may go unexplained. If the way you are approaching students is with the usual, “Do you want to study abroad?”—you may run the risk of students tuning you out or giving the default “no” to avoid looking ignorant if they don't know what study abroad is. Consider changing your language slightly to say something lines of, “Are you familiar with study abroad?” or “Have you heard about study abroad?” This allows you to create a dialogue with them and go over unfamiliar language and terms.

2

Revisit images in materials. It's surprising how many flyers, brochures, and websites are still featuring predominantly white female students as their primary demographic. While we certainly celebrate all participation in education abroad, consider the message these images are communicating with regard to who is participating in these programs. Connecting with your marketing department to see if they can access stock images or reaching out to specific study abroad alumni for a photo request are two good places to start. Simple changes in imaging, which allow students to see themselves depicted in the experience, goes a long way in reinforcing your brand as being inclusive of all students.

3

Stop saying “overseas.” Take a moment to consider the image your brain projects when you hear the term overseas. Does Canada come to mind? How about Mexico? For some yes, but for the majority us no. The term “overseas” can be interpreted with the same sentiment as employing the phrase “backpacking through Europe”—something accessible only by the privileged, adventuresome, and well-traveled individual. There are plenty of opportunities which are available to students which don't require lengthy flights thousands of miles from home. Using the term “abroad” in lieu of “overseas” cannot only be less intimidating, but it also recognizes the diversity of programs available which may be just as culturally appealing but a little closer to home.

4

Think about how you are framing and selling funding opportunities.

Whenever marketing or recruiting for events, be sure that you have a comprehensive list of funding which is available to students. Not only should it include what the scholarship is, but the amount offered and a little bit of information about the qualifying or preferred individuals and programs—especially if it gives preference to students of color or diverse backgrounds. Be careful of employing phrases like “prestigious scholarship” as they may conjure up the idea that the funding is for the elite or impossible to obtain. For first generation college students especially, they are likely thinking less about adding prestige to their college experience and more about simply surviving it. Being able to talk not only about the financial benefit of a scholarship but the professional and personal benefits is paramount as well.

5

Communicate the services provided by your office. For many students that come through the door, there is a general expectation regarding the role of the education abroad office or advisor. However, first generation college students may not have this expectation and be unaware that you are going to be with them every step of the way—for better and for worse. Being able to articulate the support you provide—help applying for passports, scholarship advising and review, pre-departure orientation, etc.—whether verbally or in written form allows them to know in advance what they can expect. Knowing they have a guide from start to finish may encourage them to take that next step in finding out more about education abroad.