



Top Tips: Advising Students of Color

Recently, there has been a focus on increasing diversity representation in study abroad. While attention has been paid to recruiting students of color to programs through inclusive marketing and various financial incentives, less attention is paid to how best to serve students of color through advisement. If international education is to be something equally accessible and attainable for all students, it is imperative to work towards more inclusive advising practices before, during and after the student's study abroad experience. Drawing from the Access, Inclusion, and Diversity (AID) Roadmap guideline on Diversity & Inclusion and the Top Five Tips to Developing a Diversity & Inclusion Strategy, the Race and Ethnicity Task Force would like to offer the top tips/best practices for advising students of color through a series of do's and don'ts.

1

DON'T Assume that because "more racially diverse students are studying abroad" = more racially diverse students are happy/comfortable/feel supported when studying abroad

International education has a tendency to use the disparate terms of diversity and inclusion interchangeably. Diversity refers to different types of people; it is the ethnic/racial makeup of a group of study abroad students. Inclusivity pertains to intention or policies; it is having a plan in place to support all students, regardless of their background.

The field has made great strides in increasing the number of students from diverse backgrounds in study abroad, yet data indicates that students of color still lag behind their white counterparts in participation rates. Furthermore, those numbers don't tell the whole story. Our goal should not only be equal representation in study abroad, but also that all students have equal opportunity to participate, and to feel comfortable, supported and engaged throughout their experience. Perhaps when we regularize inclusive advising practices, with more inclusive support abroad, we will see an increase in participation rates, as well as the happiness of students of color with their study abroad experience.

2

DO (target) advertise + market to students of diverse backgrounds

In order to advise, you first need students through the office door. This can begin with proper marketing. Numerous studies indicate that often minority students don't study abroad because they are not aware of the opportunities, or assume they are not for them. Targeted advertising is a way to counter some of these misconceptions. Think about advertising beyond the basic (though incredibly important) idea of diverse representation in photos. Consider multiple angles when you create an advertising campaign. Where and how are you marketing to the students? What are the perceived barriers you are addressing? Do you have programs going to places students from diverse backgrounds are interested in? Think about including specific groups, such as cultural clubs and organizations, in your outreach efforts.

Consider advertising an opportunity to debunk myths that bar students from thinking study abroad is for them. Research indicates that students of color perceive barriers tied to program length and fit, finances, family concerns, and long term planning. Confront these concerns head-on by creating a series of brochures that inform students about resources for scholarships and financial aid (check out Diversity Abroad for suggestions); highlight the specific academic, personal and professional benefits of study abroad; emphasize the various locations and lengths of programs; run a series of ads that highlight the experiences of study abroad alumni of color; create a Parent Guide. Make sure this information is also available on your website. In all of these materials, be clear your office is open and available for advising, guidance and support.

3

DON'T Assume a student's identity, but DO: Allow him/her to self-identify

What does it mean to allow students to self-identify? Why is this important? And how can we encourage students to comfortably do so? It's not how we see the students, but how they see themselves. It is important to recognize that racial labels are loaded terms. For instance, we often label students of color as "African-American," yet this term does not always resonate. What if a student is mixed race or perhaps Afro-Dominican? The term "black" is broader and acknowledges that not everyone in the African diaspora identifies with the term American.

Allow students to talk about identity during advising. There are many ways to do this. For instance, Babson College has students complete a form that allows them to list any of their identities, along with any of their concerns for study abroad tied to those identities. If you don't have a form, consider taking the time to ask questions: What events have shaped your identity? What organizations are you a part of on campus? You are meeting your host family for the first time, what is your most salient identity to present? Find an advising style and series of questions you feel comfortable with. Don't assume, but spend time exploring, listening, and ask for clarification instead of interpreting on the student's behalf. Be mindful of the impact of what you say, not just the intent with which you say it.

Finally, it is important to also acknowledge that though a student identifies as a certain way in America, they may not be perceived this way abroad. Being black in South Africa, or Afro-Dominican in Brazil is different. Plan to help students figure out how to prepare for these shifts and how their identity(ies) will affect their experience abroad and be sure to point out the skill set they already possess to meet this challenge.

4

DO have on-campus conversations about race + ethnicity abroad, but DON'T let workshop be facilitated by students; they should be facilitated by professionals (from IE, other campus offices, third party providers or organizations)

Discussions about race and identity should happen during individual advising, and should also be a natural part of on-campus conversations pertaining to study abroad. Make issues pertaining to race and ethnicity abroad a regular part of your information sessions, your pre-departure workshops and your returnee services. Part of inclusive advising means ensuring that students of color are prepared for their experience and that white peers are aware of the challenges facing fellow students.

While it may seem ideal to have past participants discuss with a cohort their experiences of race abroad, these sensitive topics are best navigated by professionals. Consider having a trained student ambassador on hand to offer his or her perspective, but be sure the session is facilitated by a professional. Decide if you feel comfortable leading conversations about race, ethnicity and identity. Perhaps you've had an experience of your own you can highlight, or you've taken an allies training on campus. It's not only ok, but recommended that you reach out for help. Consider your on-campus resources. This can be individuals who work in student services, health services, admissions, in a diversity office, or a faculty member. It's a good idea also to rely upon the expertise of a third party provider or an organization like Diversity Abroad to perhaps facilitate a workshop or provide resources and feedback. Finally, be sure that conversations about race don't always focus on a deficits perspective, but also discuss the unique strengths a student of color will bring to study abroad. Their unique lived experiences mean they are often better prepared to face challenging situations than their white counterparts.

5

DON'T Assume that all students of color will have the same experience, but DO: seek out + provide resources to students on the home campus, in-country/program and upon return.

One of the challenges with inclusive advising practices for students of color in study abroad, is to provide resources and support, but refrain from making broad generalizations and assume all students from a particular background will have the same experience abroad. One student's perception of China does not mean all students of color experience it the same. This is why it is crucial to explore a student's identity(ies) from the start and to provide opportunities for dialog throughout the advising process. From the outset, work to set expectations during all touch points of advising. Written resources and opportunities to connect with outside resources are a good way to empower the student to take ownership of their experience and to feel prepared and supported before, during and after their study abroad experience.

In your office, consider starting a resource room that includes articles and books about individuals from various backgrounds who have traveled abroad. Highlight some of the work of returned students. Make sure that your student workers and advisors come from diverse backgrounds and that they are trained to speak to their experiences abroad. Consider incorporating resources like the Diversity Abroad Country Climate Notes or IES' country-specific resources into your materials. Student feedback is also crucial. It not only can help inform your office's advising practices, but affords an opportunity for students to process their experience abroad. At the end of the day, it's about providing the student with information and tools so they feel prepared for their time abroad and when they return.