

**Attracting and Preparing Diverse Students for Study Abroad**

by

**Emily Sweeney**

**March 19, 2012**

**A Co-op Report Submitted in Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree of**

**Master of Science in Global & International Education**

**at Drexel University**

*We accept this report as part of the co-op portfolio as conforming to  
the required standard.*

---

**Deanna Hill, J.D., Ph.D.**  
**(Global & International Education Program)**

---

**Frank Harvey, Ph.D.**  
**(Global & International Education Program)**

---

**Seana McGovern, Ph.D.**  
**(Global & International Education Program)**

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following:

Drexel University faculty and my cohort classmates for helping me develop my knowledge and skills relating in the field of international education.

AIFS, especially Paul Watson, for giving me the opportunity to conduct my research at the company.

Dr. Hill for her encouragement, guidance and support throughout the course of this project.

My family and friends for their continuous encouragement to pursue my goals and dreams.

My cousin, Camille Sweeney, for her support and helping with editing.

My classmate, Dave Sicoli, for always being there to listen and providing comic relief to my day.

### **Abstract**

This research study focuses on attracting and preparing diverse students for study abroad. For the purpose of this study, diverse students are defined as students who identify as racial/ethnic minorities within the country in which they study, students who identify as religious minorities within the country in which they study; students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning their sexual orientation; and students with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to identify the challenges diverse students face while studying abroad in order to provide recommendations to the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) staff on how to better prepare students, both prior to their departure and during their study abroad experiences, for the challenges they face. The findings of this study demonstrate that it is essential for AIFS to provide more information to students before departure regarding challenges common to all students (e.g., culture shock, homesickness, anti-American sentiment) as well as those specific to their diversity in the country in which they will study abroad. AIFS must also inform students before departure that they will be provided more information about diversity resources while abroad, such as religious resources and LGBTQ resources. Finally, it is critical for AIFS to increase its alumni efforts in addition to offering students relevant information after they return home from studying abroad, specifically regarding reverse culture shock and how they can leverage the study abroad experience.

**Table of Contents**

Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	5
Chapter 2 – Literature Review .....	10
Chapter 3 – Research Methodology.....	21
Chapter 4: Findings and Results .....	25
Chapter 5: Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations .....	34
References.....	43
Appendix A.....	47
Appendix B .....	48
Appendix C .....	51
Appendix D.....	53
Appendix E .....	55
Appendix F.....	57

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

### **Background**

The number of U.S. college students who study abroad each year has more than doubled over the past decade from 143,590 in 1989-1990 to 260,327 in 2008-2009 (Institute of International Education, 2010). Yet, participation among underrepresented groups of students remains a challenge for international educators. Underrepresented groups encompass a wide variety of students, including but not limited to students with certain majors, males, community college students, non-traditional students, and “diverse” students (i.e., racial minorities; religious minorities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning their sexuality (LGBTQ); and students with disabilities). When it comes to studying abroad, “diverse” students often face specific challenges: financial (i.e., lack of monetary resources), institutional (i.e., credits will not transfer for their major), cultural (i.e., family attitudes toward the value of international experience), and/or discriminatory (i.e., fear of being discriminated against while abroad). These challenges must be addressed in order to promote study abroad to diverse students.

Studying abroad is a critical component of students’ college education, offering students the opportunity to immerse themselves in other cultures, expand their world view, dispel stereotypes, and gain new insights through new relationships. As former Senator Fulbright, creator of the Fulbright exchange program stated, “perhaps the greatest power of intellectual exchange is the power to convert nations into peoples and to translate ideologies into human aspirations” (U.S. Department of State, 2011). Studying abroad is a transformative experience that should be available and promoted to all students, regardless of race, religion, family income, sexuality, etc. It is critical for international educators “to close the participation gap that exists between those that do and do not study abroad” (NAFSA, 2010).

The American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) was founded in 1964 as a cultural exchange organization. With its mission “to provide the highest quality educational and cultural exchange programs to enrich the lives of young people throughout the world” (AIFS, 2012, n.p.), AIFS has become one of the largest study abroad providers in the world. For this co-op study, the researcher seeks to better understand the challenges diverse students face when studying abroad in order to recommend ways for AIFS staff to attract diverse students and provide more and/or better resources for them prior to departure and while studying abroad.

### **Problem Statement**

In order to attract and better prepare diverse students for studying abroad, AIFS must gain a deeper understanding of diverse students and the challenges they face when studying abroad. Currently, AIFS offer diversity scholarships to attract diverse students but provides limited programming specifically designed to address diversity and the challenges diverse students face when studying abroad. If AIFS does not gain a deeper understanding of diverse students and the challenges they face when studying abroad, the organization may not attract diverse students or provide the resources they need to ensure a positive and high quality study abroad experience.

### **Purpose of the Co-op Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine specific ways that AIFS can attract and better prepare diverse students for their study abroad experience. Studying abroad is a very personal experience unique to each student. While it is AIFS’s goal to treat all students with the same respect, understanding and compassion, the organization would be remiss not to take into account that each student has different needs, fears, and areas of concern. The process of studying abroad can be overwhelming, from choosing and applying to a program to securing

funding to finally traveling abroad. This is especially true for diverse students who may feel "different" from the start. Preparation for this co-op required a review of the existing research on studying abroad with respect to the four groups that fall into the diverse student definition: racial minority students, religious minority students, LGBTQ students and students with disabilities. The intention is not to classify these students as *others*, but to improve understanding of their needs in order to better serve them.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions will guide the research:

1. What challenges do diverse students face with respect to being a “diverse” student studying abroad?
2. With respect to diversity, what information do diverse students wish they knew before they studied abroad?
3. How prepared are AIFS staff to handle sensitive questions and concerns relating to diversity?
4. How do the AIFS website and pre-departure information attract and engage diverse students?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The research was designed from a social constructivist worldview. A social constructivist worldview holds that “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Creswell, 2009, p.8). The goal of the research is “to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). The intent is to bring to light the concerns and challenges AIFS diverse student alumni have faced during their study abroad experience.

**Importance of the Co-op Study**

This co-op study is important because the findings of this study will inform AIFS's strategic plan to attract and better prepare these students for studying abroad. This will contribute to the organization's vision of bringing the world together. Information collected through this co-op will also provide AIFS with ways to improve the pre-departure information provided to students as well as the aifsabroad.com website to include additional resources for diverse students who are interested in studying abroad. This research may potentially be shared with the field of international education to contribute to the body of literature on this topic.

**Study Limitations**

One limitation of this study is that all student data was collected from diverse students who have studied abroad on AIFS programs. Another limitation of this study is that all student data was collected from diverse students who ultimately decided to study abroad. The researcher did not have access to diverse students who decided not to study abroad. Therefore, their reasons for not studying abroad and other concerns, fears, or questions they may have had which resulted in their decision not to study abroad are beyond the scope of this study.

**Definition of Terms**

The following is a list of significant terms used throughout this paper and their respective definitions:

*Study Abroad* – short-term programs; semester and academic year programs as well as internships abroad

*Underrepresented Groups* - categories of students who study abroad in fewer numbers than they represent in a larger population



*Diverse Students* - racial minority students, religious minority students, LGBTQ students and students with disabilities

*Racial Minority Students* – students who are a member of a racial minority group within their host country

*Religious Minority Students* – students who are a member of a religious minority group within their host country

*LGBTQ Students* – students who would identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning their sexuality

*Students with Disabilities* – students who have a physical, mental, learning or sensory disability

### **Summary**

Studying abroad should be promoted to all college students as it is an important opportunity to participate in a transformative experience. Gaining a deeper understanding of diverse students' concerns, fears, and questions about studying abroad will be the foundation upon which AIFS can begin to find ways to increase diverse student participation on study abroad programs. Based on the research outcomes, the researcher will make recommendations on how AIFS can better prepare diverse students for studying abroad.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### Introduction

Globalization has dramatically changed the world we live in, and it is important that all students are able to take advantage of global academic opportunities. Studying abroad can provide tremendous academic, professional, and personal benefits for students. Although overall participation in study abroad is increasing, the field has not changed over the past three decades; participants remain overwhelmingly white and female (Tillman, 2010). Attracting diverse students to study abroad has been a challenge that has sparked much discussion in the international education field. These students “face many constraints, many of which are not faced by their majority student peers” (Brux & Fry, 2010). Less research has been done on the experiences of diverse students who actually do study abroad. This literature review will analyze and synthesize the major ideas and results of research in the field with respect to racial minority students, religious minority students, LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities studying abroad.

### Historical and Current Studies

#### Diverse Students

In order to understand the major ideas and results of research in the field with respect to diverse students, it is important to understand the makeup of U.S. study abroad students more broadly. With regard to race/ethnicity, study abroad students are predominantly Caucasian.

Table 1.

*Percent of U.S. Study Abroad Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2009-10*

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>U.S. Postsecondary Enrollment</b>	<b>U.S. Students Abroad</b>
African American	14.3%	4.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.5%	7.9%
Caucasian	62.3%	78.7%

Hispanic/Latino American	12.5%	6.4%
Multiracial	Not Available	1.9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.0%	0.5%
Nonresident Alien	3.4%	Not Available

(NAFSA, 2011).

As shown in Table 1, Caucasian students are the most highly represented racial/ethnic group in both post-secondary enrollment (62.3%) and study abroad (78%). While Asian/Pacific Islander students represent 6.5% of post-secondary enrollment, they are the next most highly represented racial/ethnic group in study abroad (7.9%).

The most common host region for study abroad students is Europe.

Table 2.

*Percent of U.S. Study Abroad Students by Host Region, 2009-10*

<b>Host Region</b>	<b>U.S. Students Abroad</b>
Africa	5.5%
Asia	12.0%
Europe	53.5%
Latin America	15.0%
Middle East	1.8%
North America	0.7%
Oceania	5.0%
Multiple Regions	6.5%

(NAFSA, 2011).

As shown in Table 2, Europe hosts the largest number of U.S. students, with more than half (54%) of students studying abroad in this region. Asia hosts the next largest number of U.S. students at 12%.

Table 3

*Percent of U.S. Study Abroad Students by Field of Study, 2007-08*

<b>Academic Field of Study</b>	<b>U.S. Postsecondary Enrollment</b>	<b>U.S. Students Abroad</b>
Vocational/Technical	2.1%	n/a
Business & Management	16.4%	20.2%

Education	8.4%	4.1%
Engineering, Math or Computer Science	8.9%	4.7%
Health Sciences	13.9%	4.5%
Humanities	14.0%	27.9%
Law	0.7%	n/a
Other	10.2%	5.4%
Physical & Life Sciences	6.0%	8.4%
Social Science	6.5%	21.5%
Undeclared	13.0%	3.3%

(NAFSA, 2011).

As shown in Table 3, the three most popular majors for U.S. study abroad students are humanities, social science, and business/management, respectively (NAFSA, 2011). A much greater percentage of social science students study abroad (21.5%) than represented in post-secondary enrollment (6.5%).

The number of U.S. students studying abroad still only “represents about 1 percent of all students enrolled at institutions of higher education in the United States” (NAFSA, 2011). Therefore, the percentage of students who study abroad and fall into the “diverse” category is fractional. However, this does not make them any less important. It is critical for international educators to ensure that all study abroad students’ needs are met.

Brown University’s Office of International Programs has created a booklet titled “Diversity Issues in Study Abroad” that highlights overall issues pertaining to diversity. The booklet provides a comprehensive collection of quotes from Brown University students about their experiences abroad. The quotes include issues “of diversity in study abroad including ethnicity, heritage, sexual orientation, religion, minority/majority issues, physical appearance and language” (Helpful Study Abroad and Travel Resources, 2011). This booklet is an invaluable resource as it provides thoughtful reflections and insight from many different student perspectives. Additionally, the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Act seeks to expand study

abroad participation through a competitive grant model. One of the four goals of this initiative is to “encourage diversity in student participation in study abroad” (NAFSA, 2011)

### **Racial Minority Students**

The literature on racial minorities in study abroad can be categorized by two issues: the lack of racial minority students in the U.S. studying abroad and the challenges students face being considered a racial minority in the country where he/she is studying abroad (e.g., a Caucasian student in Tanzania or an Asian-American student in Bolivia). The majority of the literature in the field has to do with the former, racial minority students in the U.S. studying abroad.

There has been an abundance of research conducted and articles written regarding the challenges and constraints these students face when it comes to studying abroad. Most experts agree that the main barriers that prevent racial minority students from going abroad are financial barriers, lack of information, family concerns, academic scheduling difficulties and absence of relevant programs (Brux & Fry, 2010). Additionally, these students may not easily see the academic, professional and personal advantages that can accrue from studying abroad (Tillman, 2010). International educators believed that racial minority student participation in study abroad would improve after the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act stipulating that federal financial-aid payments could be used for study abroad (Monaghan, 1994). However, finances have remained a constraint over the past two decades, as many racial minority students work to support themselves and cannot afford to be away from home (Brux & Fry, 2010).

In 2009, Blumenthal, Chief Operating Officer of the Institute of International Education (IIE), stated that “one program that shows it is certainly possible to dramatically increase minority study abroad is the Gilman program” (Diverse Issues in Higher Education, 2009).

Established in 2001 and funded by the federal government, the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship program provides 2,300 scholarships a year to Pell Grant Recipients to study abroad, particularly at nontraditional study abroad destinations. Sixty percent of the recipients are racial minority students (Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, 2011). While the Gilman program has been effective, it cannot work alone to attract racial minority students to study abroad.

Lack of information about study abroad and family concerns are two other challenges that these students face. Many colleges and universities offer information and resources for racial minority students on their respective study abroad websites; however, unless these students are actively seeking out this information, it goes unnoticed. Experts have found that word of mouth and peer-to-peer outreach is so important in reaching these groups (Diverse Issues in Higher Education, 2009). However, outreach from study abroad offices on campuses varies dramatically by school.

Negative parental attitudes toward study abroad have been found to hinder many racial minority students. Perceptions are difficult to change and, in some cultures, study abroad is considered a frivolous luxury. According to Gordon (2008), founder of the website *Diversity Abroad*, “few minority students come from well-traveled families and many arrive at college with the mind-set that they are there to move quickly to the job market” (as cited in Norton, 2008). It has also been found that some parents and students fear they will encounter racial discrimination and prejudice abroad, causing them to shy away from taking advantage of this opportunity (Brux and Fry, 2010; Norton, 2008).

One long-term study conducted by Salisbury, Paulsen, and Pascarella (2008) provides a simple, yet somewhat conflicting, reason as to why there is a gap in study abroad participation.

The findings suggest “minority students don’t need to seek out cross-cultural experiences by traveling to another country because, in most cases, they already regularly interact across cultural differences in their everyday lives” (Schmidt, 2010). Davies, Princeton University’s vice provost for international initiatives, states that this particular study did not provide any clear guidance for translating its findings into practice, but it does prove that we cannot simply rely on a one-size-fits-all approach to promoting study abroad (Schmidt, 2010). She recommends that colleges find new ways to market study abroad to racial minority students, such as outreach programs for high school students or social networking with study abroad alumni (Schmidt, 2010).

### **Religious Minority Students**

Religion plays an important role in many cultures around the world. For students studying abroad, it may be the first time they are exposed to or in close contact with a different belief system. It is important for students to be aware if their beliefs differ from the dominant culture of their host country. Being a part of the religious minority can sometimes be challenging for students, especially if they are planning to practice their religion abroad. A religious minority student refers to any student who practices a religion that is not the majority religion in the country they are studying abroad in. This could be a Jewish student in Italy, a Buddhist student in Argentina, a Christian student in Israel, or a Muslim student in Brazil.

There is relatively very little broad research in the field regarding students who are considered religious minorities in the country in which they are studying. In recent years, specific research has been conducted pertaining to challenges faced by U.S. students studying in Arabic countries. However, one challenge discussed in the 2009 IIE report titled “Expanding U.S. Study Abroad in the Arab World: Challenges and Opportunities” focused on the safety and

security concerns of being a U.S. American student, not necessarily with respect to religion. It did not emphasize any particular religion, but simply anti-American and anti-Westerner sentiments (Mills, 2009).

DiversityAbroad.com provides a page on its website titled “Religious Diversity for Study Abroad,” where it provides questions students should ask about religion as well as tips about religion (DiversityAbroad.com, 2009). Overall, there is a significant gap in the research surrounding religious minority students studying abroad. This topic needs to be explored further with a focus on specific minority religions within a country.

### **LGBTQ Students**

Once considered a taboo topic in the United States, sexual orientation is now widely discussed within American culture. In recent years, there has been public debate regarding LGBTQ civil rights and same-sex marriage. Regardless of which side of the debate one falls, the LGBTQ community has a strong presence within the country.

The degree to which LGBTQ students feel accepted within the U.S. varies significantly across the country. While there will always be students who live in fear of “coming out” to friends and family, many students are able to be open about their sexual orientation. It is becoming more common on college campuses across the country to see LGBTQ student centers and organizations established to provide support for this community that is becoming more visible.

“LGBTQ people experience oppression everywhere in the world, though there are different levels of acceptance in different countries” (NAFSA, 2001). It is important for students to understand that they may have to adapt to different customs while abroad. In some countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, homosexuality is illegal and punishable by law (Public



Agenda, 2011). LGBTQ students must find out what kinds of legal rights they will have in their host country (NAFSA, 2001). Some students have found that it is necessary to conceal their sexual orientation for safety reasons, while others feel safe to openly express their sexual identity. Furthermore, discussing sexual orientation is considered taboo in some cultures, while in others it is acceptable (DiversityAbroad.com, 2009).

There are many resources available for LGBTQ students who wish to study abroad. However, not unlike racial and religious minority students who wish to study abroad, LGBTQ students must be actively seeking this information. A handful of colleges have set up programs to help LGBTQ students prepare for study abroad, but still sexual orientation is a topic that makes some advisors feel uncomfortable (Rainbow SIG, 2011). Meanwhile there are some programs that have been established and specifically designed for students interested in LGBTQ issues. The School for International Training has created a semester-long program in the Netherlands that explores gay life within the country (Rainbow SIG, 2011). Global Experiences has developed an LGBT Internship Program which “offers an unparalleled opportunity to gain valuable work experience in a career area that also has considerable resonance and personal meaning to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students around the globe. For ally friends or those pursuing careers in social work, human rights or progressive public policies, an internship with an LBGT organization can also be a rewarding, life altering experience” (Global Experiences, 2010).

### **Students with Disabilities**

“One of the most encouraging trends in recent years is the increasing number of students with disabilities who have been able to take advantage of education abroad opportunities” (Katz, 2007). Students with disabilities encompass those with learning, mental, physical or sensory

disabilities. Approximately 1,400 students with disabilities studied abroad during the 2007-2008 academic year, which accounted for three percent of all students who studied abroad that year (Institute of International Education, 2010). According to Cornell's Education Department statistics, 10.8% of all undergraduates reported a disability in 2007-2008 (Roberts, 2009).

One major challenge that students with disabilities face is lack of information. Many students assume that studying abroad is simply not an option for them because other countries will be unable to accommodate their specific needs. Other students may feel discouraged due to the difficulties of getting simple accommodations here in the United States; they think that if they have so much trouble here, how will they be able to survive abroad (Roberts, 2009). Types of accommodations could include an interpreter, a single room for living, wheelchair accessible facilities, note-takers, additional time on tests, etc. The field of international education can easily overcome this challenge by making relevant information readily available to students with disabilities. Letting these students know that it is possible for them to study abroad and it has been done can make a big difference. It is critical for international education offices to work closely with student disability services offices at schools to ensure that that these students are equipped with the proper information (Katz, 2007).

“For many students with disabilities, international experiences offer a range of new challenges and experiences related to accessibility and opportunities to explore new strategies for independence and inclusion” (Mobility International USA, 2007). Mobility International USA provides a wide variety of resources available for students with disabilities who wish to study abroad, as well as for international educators who are interested in learning more about working with this population of students. Resources include papers, publications, newsletters, books,

videos and a comprehensive disability etiquette handbook; however, this information is only readily available for those who are seeking it.

### **Research Problem and Theoretical Framework**

In order to attract diverse students to study abroad and better prepare them for the experience, the researcher will identify the challenges these students face with respect to studying abroad before departure and while abroad. These challenges will be analyzed within the context of looking at the social norms of the dominant culture within a student's host country. "Social norms are rules developed by a group of people that specify how people must, should, may, should not, and must not behave in various situations" (Sociology Guide, 2011). There are two types of social norms. An injunctive norm refers to attitudes or what people feel is right based on morals or beliefs. A descriptive norm relates to behavior or what people actually do (Berkowitz, 2011). The researcher will be using both types of social norms to analyze the challenges diverse students encounter when it comes to studying abroad.

The research was designed from a social constructivist worldview. A social constructivist worldview holds that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Creswell, 2009, p.8). The goal of the research is "to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). The intent is to bring to light the concerns and challenges AIFS diverse student alumni have faced during their study abroad experience.

### **Summary**

The importance of study abroad cannot be understated. During a visit to Howard University, First Lady Michelle Obama stated:

“Studying abroad isn’t just an important part of a well-rounded educational experience. It’s also becoming increasingly important for success in the modern global economy. Getting ahead in today’s workplaces isn’t just about the skills you bring from the classroom. It’s also about the experience you have with the world beyond our borders – with people, and languages, and cultures that are very different from our own” (Diverse Staff, 2011).

International educators cannot follow a one-size-fits-all approach to promoting study abroad. The entire field must make a concerted effort to find ways to reach out to all students in order to diversify study abroad. There have been many research studies conducted and articles written regarding racial minority students, LGBTQ students and students with disabilities with respect to the challenges and issues they face when studying abroad. However, the field is lacking research on specific problems or constraints that these students must manage while abroad. This study will focus on determining challenges, issues and concerns diverse students have about studying abroad. The researcher will analyze these by looking at how they relate to the social norms of the dominant culture within the host country in order to better attract diverse student to participate in AIFS programs and better prepare them for their study abroad experience.

## **Chapter 3 – Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The research conducted in this study sought to gain a better understanding of diverse students with respect to the challenges they face when studying abroad in order to better prepare them for their study abroad experience. It also determined ways to improve the AIFS website and pre-departure information as well as better prepare AIFS staff to handle sensitive questions and concerns related to diversity. A mixed methods research approach was used to obtain, analyze and report the data to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the research:

1. What challenges do diverse students face with respect to being a “diverse” student studying abroad?
2. With respect to diversity, what information do diverse students wish they knew before they studied abroad?
3. How prepared are AIFS staff to handle sensitive questions and concerns relating to diversity?
4. How do the AIFS website and pre-departure information attract and engage diverse students?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This is a sequential, mixed method study. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods “in tandem so that the overall strength of the study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research” alone (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative method included a survey for student alumni. Qualitative methods included interviews with select

student alumni and AIFS Resident Directors. The researcher also posted questions on the SECUSS-L listserv to all education abroad professional subscribers in order to gain a better understand of what other institutions are doing to promote study abroad to diverse students and how they address these students' needs. Additionally, the researcher evaluated the AIFS website, literature and marketing materials, as well as websites of other study abroad companies, academic institutions and diversity groups/associations to determine overall best practices with respect to diversity in study abroad.

The quantitative surveys were administered first and were followed by the qualitative interviews, which expanded understanding and provided support for the quantitative data. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods guided the researcher by providing "both the structure of quantitative research and flexibility with of qualitative inquiry" (Creswell, 2009).

## **Quantitative Research**

### **Survey for AIFS Student Alumni**

The quantitative survey was designed to collect data on the challenges diverse students face when studying abroad. It also solicited data from students on the information they wished they had known before they studied abroad.

### ***Measures/Instruments***

A survey was created using the web survey application QuestBack. This instrument enabled the researcher to obtain data from participants around the country at minimal cost. Additionally, it allowed participants to respond at their convenience in a short period of time. The introductory email and survey instrument are included in Appendices A and B.

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

Invitations to participants were sent out to AIFS student alumni via email with a link to the survey. Email requests were sent at the beginning of February to approximately 2,900 AIFS student alumni who participated on study abroad programs between Fall 2010 and Fall 2011. Participants were given a deadline (two weeks) for submission to encourage participation. A follow-up reminder email was sent on day 8 to those who had not responded to the survey. Limitations to this method of data collection are that AIFS may not have had the current email address of alumni who have graduated or some alumni may not have had access to the internet during the period of time when the survey was administered.

### ***Pilot Study***

Due to the limited time frame, a pilot study was not performed.

### ***Data Analysis***

After the survey closed, aggregate data was obtained from the survey website. The data was analyzed for frequencies and percentages.

## **Qualitative Research**

### **Interviews with AIFS Student Alumni**

After quantitative data was collected, 15 minute phone interviews with 10 AIFS student alumni were conducted during the month of February. Participants were selected based on two criteria: (1) the alumnae represents one of the diverse student categories (racial minority students, religious minority students, LGBTQ students and students with disabilities) (2) the alumnae responded “yes” to the “Are you willing to participate in a short follow up phone interview?” question on the survey. The purpose of the interviews was to gain further insight into the challenges these participants faced as diverse students abroad and what information they would have found helpful to know before departure. Additionally, the researcher elicited ideas

from alumni for how to attract other diverse students to study abroad. The interview protocol is included in Appendix C.

#### **Email to SECUSS-L listserv**

SECUSS-L (<http://www.usouthal.edu/acip/secussl/index.htm>) is a free electronic forum for Education Abroad professionals. The researcher posted questions on the SECUSS-L listserv to elicit information about what education abroad professionals are doing at their respective institutions to promote study abroad to diverse students, how they are preparing them for the experience and overall best practices. The email was sent in early February. Limitations to this method of data collection were that the request for participation could be easily ignored or a hesitation to share information with a competitor. To address this, the researcher stated the intent to share a summary of responses with the listserv and keep all identities anonymous. The email to SECUSS-L listserv is included in Appendix D.

#### **Email Interviews with AIFS Resident Directors**

An email interview was sent to all AIFS Resident Directors during the beginning of February. The purpose of this interview was to gain insight into what the Resident Directors are currently doing for diverse students abroad as well as what areas need to be improved. Additionally, the researcher elicited ideas from the Resident Directors about what additional information the AIFS College Division staff in the U.S. could provide to diverse students to better prepare them for their study abroad experience. The interview protocol is included in Appendix E.



## Chapter 4: Findings and Results

### Introduction

The primary goal of this co-op study was to gain a thorough understanding of diverse students and the challenges they face when studying abroad in order to provide more relevant information to better prepare them for their study abroad experience. The researcher also investigated ways to improve the AIFS website and pre-departure materials as well as better prepare AIFS staff to handle sensitive questions and concerns related to diversity. A mixed method research approach was used to obtain, analyze and report the data to draw conclusions and make recommendations. The findings provide the information needed to improve the AIFS website and pre-departure information with additional resources for students.

### Findings

The AIFS student alumni survey elicited 460 unique responses out of the 2917 invitations that were sent for an overall response rate of 15.7%. Only one person responded to the SECUSS-L posting. Lack of response could be due to the post being easily ignored or a hesitation to share information with a competitor. Of the 460 alumni who responded to the survey, the following table shows a breakdown of those who self-identified as belonging to one or more of the diverse student category.

*Table 4*

Alumni Who Self-Identified as Diverse Students

<b>Diverse Students</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Racial minority students <i>within</i> their host country	97	21%
Religious minority students <i>within</i> their host country	74	16%
LGBTQ students	24	5%
Students with a disability	17	4%

*Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive (a student could fall into one or more categories)*

As shown in Table 4, just over one fifth of alumni identified as being a racial minority student within their host country, while 16% identified as being a religious minority within their host country, 5% identified as being an LGBTQ student, and 4% identified as being a student with a disability. Of the 460 alumni who responded to the survey, 27 alumni offered to be contacted for a follow-up phone interview. The researcher conducted 20 follow-up phone interviews with those who fell into the diverse student definition. The findings are discussed as they respond to the research questions that guided this study.

### 1. What challenges do diverse students face with respect to being a “diverse” student studying abroad?

The research revealed four main challenges that alumni experienced while abroad: homesickness, feeling “different” from the locals, culture shock and discrimination based on nationality.

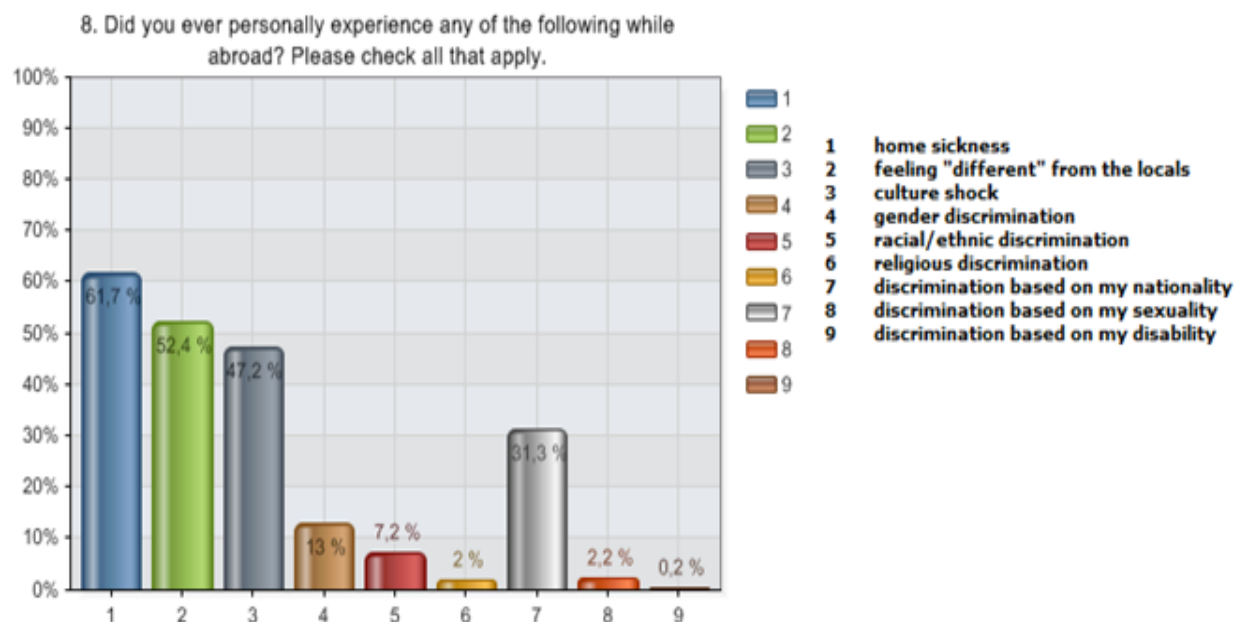


Figure 1: Did you ever personally experience any of the following while abroad?

As shown in Figure 1 above, 7.2% of students reported they experienced racial/ethnic discrimination while abroad, 2% reported they experienced religious discrimination while abroad, 2.2% reported they experienced discrimination based on their sexuality while abroad, and 0.2% reported they experienced discrimination based on their disability while abroad. It should be noted that the numbers may be slightly inflated as a handful of students noted in the open-ended questions that they would have selected “none of above” if it were an option on the survey. The challenges most often cited by alumni in the open-ended questions were culture shock, the language barrier, and integrating themselves in the local culture.

The challenges among diverse students while abroad were congruent with the findings for all students. Only 10% of racial minority students reported racial/ethnic discrimination while abroad, 5% of religious minority students reported religious discrimination while abroad, 8% of LGBTQ students reported discrimination based on their sexuality while abroad, and no students with disabilities reported discrimination based on their disability. In the open-ended questions, several racial minority students reported that it was difficult to adjust because they looked different than the locals. There were some Caucasian students who studied in South Africa that stated that it was difficult to be a racial minority and that they were surprised at the direct approach South Africans took when discussing race and socioeconomic issues. It is important to note that the sample sizes for the diverse groups of students were small, so it is difficult to make any generalizations.

From the interviews with alumni, the main issues that came up repeatedly were culture shock, language barrier, and an anti-American sentiment. In fact, all students reported they had experienced an anti-American sentiment while abroad. Many students mentioned general negative attitudes toward Americans while abroad as well as being teased about U.S. American

stereotypes. A few students reported that most foreigners they encountered had negative opinions of the U.S. government; however, all students were quick to point out that they also encountered many people who warmly welcomed Americans.

One African American student who studied in South Africa explained how she often felt confused about her ethnicity, race, and nationality while abroad. She grew up in a predominantly white affluent community and was always referred to as “the black girl”. When she arrived in South Africa, at first glance she felt more at home among people of color, but soon realized that “I was still an outsider because I wasn’t born in Africa. People immediately knew I was American. It was frustrating sometimes, but to be honest looking back it was the first time I ever felt truly American.”

## 2. With respect to diversity, what information do diverse students wish they knew before they studied abroad?

Many of the alumni indicated they would have liked more information prior to departure.

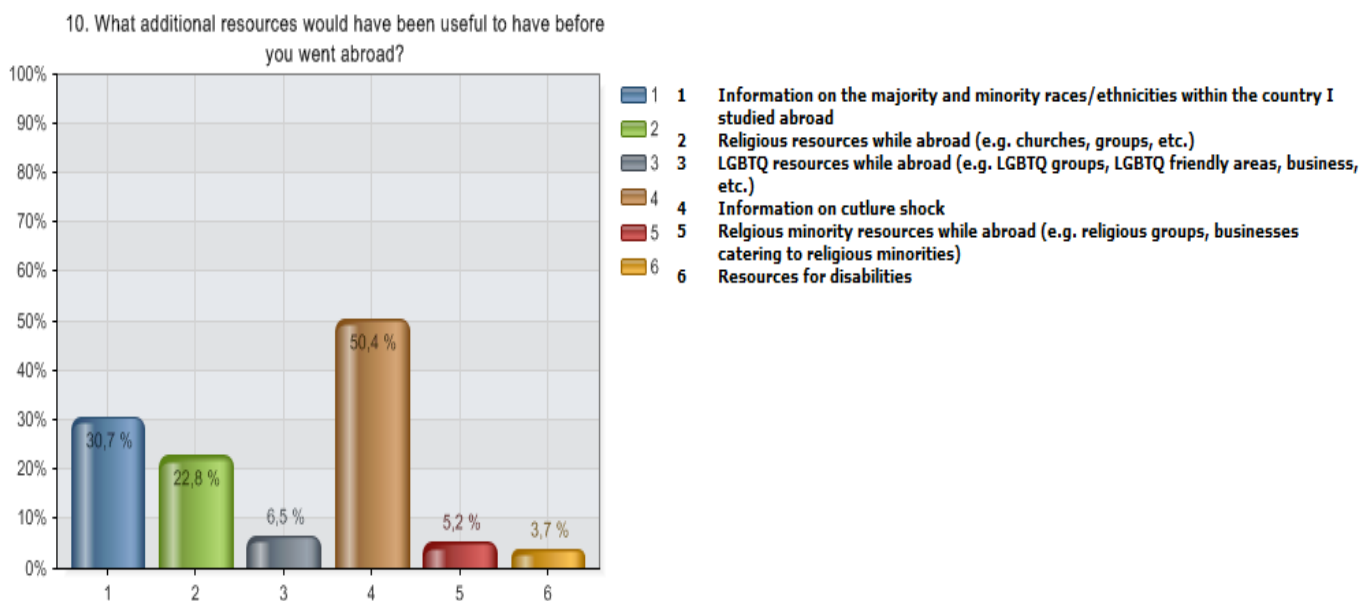


Figure 2: What additional resources would have been useful to have before you went abroad?

As shown in Figure 2, just over half of alumni who responded to the survey would have liked more information on culture shock before departure, 31% wanted more information on the majority and minority races/ethnicities in their host country, and 23% thought additional religious resources would have been useful to know before they went abroad.

The AIFS pre-departure handbooks, which are available to all accepted students, do provide some information on culture shock; however, there is no information in them about majority and minority races and ethnicities or religious resources. The majority of the AIFS Resident Directors reported that they do go over these issues during Orientation when the students arrive in country. Several Resident Directors noted they also have individual meetings with each student at the start of the semester to address any concerns. Additionally, while the majority of Resident Directors reported that they do provide information to students about reverse culture shock right before they leave for home, there is also no information provided to students *after* they return home from abroad regarding reverse culture shock. There is also very little information on the AIFS website regarding majority and minority races/ethnicities, religious resources while abroad, LGBTQ resources while abroad, culture shock/reverse culture shock, or resources for disabilities.

Both racial and religious minority students cited they would have liked more information about the majority and minority races/ethnicities within their host country and more information on culture shock before they studied abroad.

Table 5

*What additional resources would have been useful to have before you went abroad?*

Additional Resources	Racial minority students	Religious minority students	LGBTQ students	Students with disabilities
----------------------	--------------------------	-----------------------------	----------------	----------------------------

Information on the majority and minority races/ethnicities within the country I studied in	44%	37%	8%	18%
Religious resources while abroad (e.g., churches, groups, etc.)	24%	31%	13%	29%
LGBTQ resources while abroad (e.g., LGBTQ groups, LGBTQ friendly areas, businesses, etc.)	6%	8%	83%	12%
Information on culture shock	40%	41%	17%	41%
Religious minority resources while abroad (e.g., religious groups, businesses catering to religious minorities)	8%	20%	4%	6%
Resources for disabilities	6%	5%	0%	35%

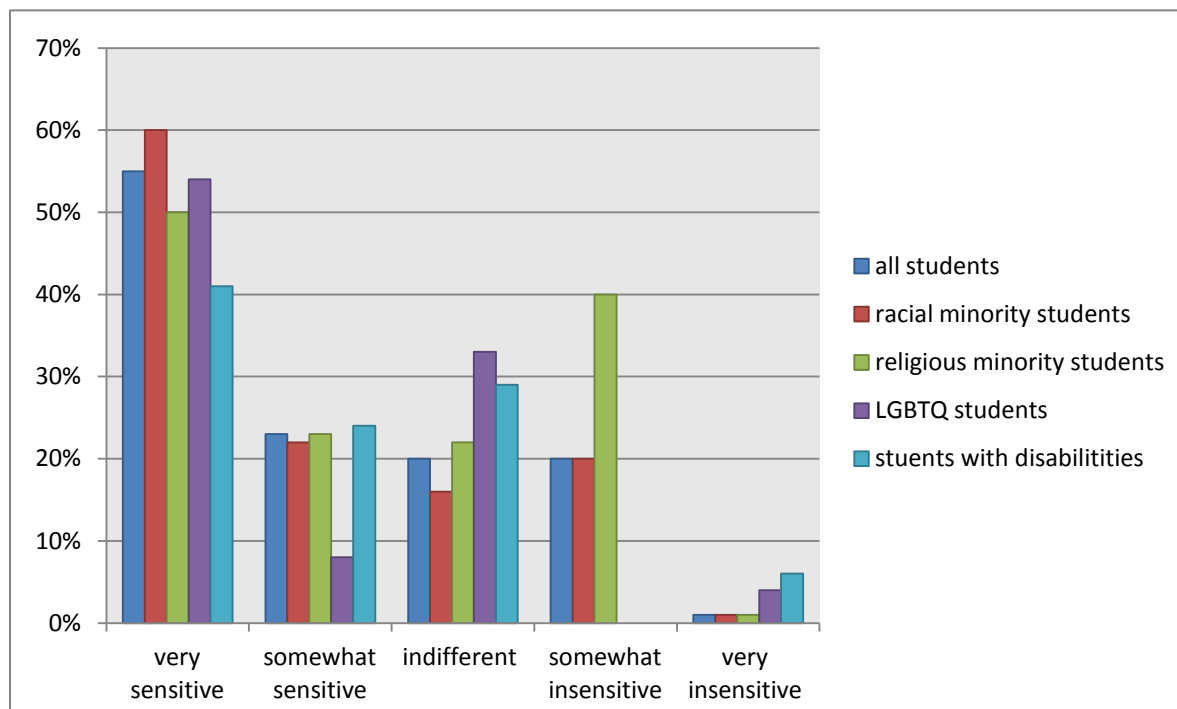
As summarized in Table 5 above, 31% of religious minority students reported they would have also liked more information on religious resources and 83% of LGBTQ students would have wanted more information about the LGBTQ resources abroad. Students with disabilities indicated they would have liked information on culture shock (41%) and resources for disabilities (35%) while abroad.

Furthermore, in the open-ended questions, the most common comments from racial minority students were that they would have liked more information on race/ethnicity within their host country and a better understanding of how locals view Americans before departure. Having information on LGBTQ resources before they went abroad was often cited by LGBTQ students. Religious minority students frequently noted that they would have liked to know about local churches, synagogues, and other types of religious resources before they went abroad.

Most comments from alumni interviews were similar to the findings from the survey. Religious resources and information on how to deal with the anti-Americanism abroad were often mentioned. Having more information on culture shock before departure and reverse culture shock after the program was over were two additional points that were repeatedly brought up by alumni.

### 3. How prepared are AIFS staff to handle sensitive questions and concerns relating to diversity?

Both quantitative and qualitative data from the alumni survey suggested that the AIFS staff—both in the U.S. and abroad—are very sensitive to students’ concerns relating to diversity.



*Figure 3: To what extent was the AIFS staff sensitive to your concerns relating to diversity?*

As shown in Figure 3, more than 40% of students in each category indicated that AIFS staff was “very sensitive” to their concerns. This was again confirmed during the follow-up phone interviews with alumni. However, it is important to note that there may have been a higher likelihood that students who volunteered to be contacted for the phone interview had a good experience with AIFS programs. Several alumni provided anecdotal evidence of instances where the AIFS staff abroad went above and beyond to address a concern relating to diversity. One such instance was recounted by a female student who studied in Salzburg, Austria. Soon after arrival, her gay male friend realized his roommate was “outwardly homophobic,” which was

making him uncomfortable. The AIFS Resident Director took action immediately and found an alternative housing accommodation for him.

Complicating these findings is the percentages of students who indicated AIFS staff were “somewhat insensitive” or “very insensitive” to their concerns relating to diversity. A full 40% of religious minority students and 20% of racial minority students indicated that AIFS were “somewhat insensitive” to their diversity-related concerns. Further, nearly 5% of students with disabilities indicated the AIFS staff were “very indifferent” to their diversity-related concerns.

#### **4. How do the AIFS website and pre-departure information attract and engage diverse students?**

The AIFS website is a great resource for students, parents and study abroad advisers to learn more detailed information about AIFS programs. However, the website is lacking in a few key areas. There is no general study abroad Frequently Asked Questions section (FAQ) on the website for students. A section devoted to parents was recently added which provides comprehensive information for parents and does include an FAQ section. There is also a section devoted to AIFS Alumni; however, it is not very robust. There is no information regarding culture shock/reverse culture shock. Furthermore, there are no resources relating to diversity available on the AIFS website other than the AIFS diversity scholarship information.

The AIFS pre-departure materials are program specific and very detailed. Overall, the information provided in the pre-departure handbooks and on the student portals is comprehensive. However, the topics of interest of which there is either no information or very little information about include homesickness, culture shock, the racial/religious majority and minorities within the country, LGBTQ information, and understanding the anti-American sentiment abroad.



**Results**

The results of this study include the research instruments created by the researcher: the AIFS Alumni survey, follow up phone interview protocol, email interview questions for AIFS Resident Directors and SECUSS-L listserv questions for international education professionals. The AIFS Alumni survey and follow up phone interview questions were informed by the literature review and could be used by AIFS or other program providers in the future to gather this information from students.

Additionally, the researcher created two sets of recommendations. The first set of recommendations was developed for AIFS to help the organization better attract and prepare diverse students for study abroad. The second set of recommendations includes recommendations for future research. Both sets of recommendations are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The intent of this mixed-methods study was to investigate the challenges that diverse students face when studying abroad in order to provide more relevant pre-departure information to better prepare them for their study abroad experience.

The research questions posed in this study were:

1. What challenges do diverse students face with respect to being a “diverse” student studying abroad?
2. With respect to diversity, what information do diverse students wish they knew before they studied abroad?
3. How prepared are AIFS staff to handle sensitive questions and concerns relating to diversity?
4. How do the AIFS website and pre-departure information attract and engage diverse students?

### **Conclusions**

The findings of this study support the literature on the challenges faced by diverse students when studying abroad. The findings also build upon that literature by identifying ways in which students are diverse within the country in which they study as well the cultural information and resources they wish they had been provided prior to studying abroad.

Based on the Alumni survey and follow-up phone interviews, the researcher found that the AIFS staff is very sensitive to questions and concerns relating to diversity. However, as explained in Chapter 4, this information could be biased; the alumni who volunteered to participate in the phone interview may have done so because they had positive experiences with

AIFS. Complicating this finding, a significant number of religious minority students and racial minority students indicated that AIFS staff was “somewhat insensitive” to their diversity-related concerns and some students with disabilities reported that AIFS were “very insensitive” to their diversity-related concerns.

### **Implications**

This co-op study has several implications for the study abroad field. It expands the conversation for students considering studying abroad and their choice of program location based on their cultural match. It is also important for AIFS as well as other study abroad program providers and institutions to evaluate how they track data and what kind of data they are collecting. They should consider obtaining disaggregated data based on the four categories of diverse students (racial minority students, religious minority students, LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities) in order to further investigate the challenges these students face when studying abroad and how to better prepare these students for the experience.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the researcher has developed the following recommendations.

#### **Recommendations for AIFS**

1. AIFS should provide more information to students before departure regarding culture shock, homesickness and anti-American sentiment while abroad.

From the AIFS Alumni survey and follow-up phone interviews, the top three challenges students faced when studying abroad were homesickness (61.7%), culture shock (47.2%) and discrimination based on nationality (31.3%). Furthermore, 50% of students marked that more information on culture shock before departure would have been useful. After evaluating the AIFS pre-departure information, it is evident that AIFS provides very little information to

students regarding these issues. The researcher recommends that AIFS provides more information on ways to deal with culture shock, homesickness and the anti-American sentiment abroad (discrimination based on nationality) to students via email before departure. This information should also be included on the accepted student portals and in the program handbooks. It is important not to deter students or scare them away from studying abroad, but to inform them about these problems they may encounter while abroad. Being informed about these issues prior to departure will allow students to be better prepared for their experience.

2. AIFS should provide additional resources relating to diversity in study abroad on the [www.aifsabroad.com](http://www.aifsabroad.com) website in order to attract diverse students to the programs.

Based on the findings from the AIFS Alumni survey and follow-up phone interviews, 44% of racial minorities and 37% of religious minorities cited more information on the majority and minority races/ethnicities within their host country would have been useful before departure. Almost 31% percent of religious minority students reported they would have also liked more information on religious resources before going abroad, and 83% of LGBTQ students would have wanted more information about the LGBTQ resources abroad. Students with disabilities indicated they would have liked more information on culture shock (41%) and resources for disabilities (35%) while abroad.

There is very little general information about each country location on the AIFS website. The researcher recommends that AIFS adds general information about each country for all program locations under the “Overview at a Glance” section in between the “Program at a Glance” and “Interactive Map” tabs as seen in Figure 4 below.



The screenshot shows the AIFS Study Abroad website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'About us', 'Contact us', '(800) 727-2437', and 'Login to your account'. Below this is a search bar and an 'APPLY NOW' button. The main navigation menu includes 'FOR STUDENTS', 'FOR FACULTY & ADVISORS', and 'FOR ALUMNI'. The secondary menu lists 'THE AIFS VALUE', 'STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS', 'SCHOLARSHIPS/GRANTS', 'STUDENT JOURNALS', 'VIDEOS', 'NEWSLETTER', 'HOW TO APPLY', and 'GET A CATALOG'. The main content area features a large photo of five students smiling, with a red arrow pointing to the 'OVERVIEW' tab in the navigation menu. Below the photo, there is a video player showing 'AIFS in Florence - Italy Study Abroad'. The 'Overview' section includes a brief description of the program, a 'Get a Catalog' button, and an 'Apply Online' button. The 'Program at a glance' section lists key details about the program, such as academic year, GPA requirements, and included fees. The 'Student Reviews' section shows a 4.7 rating based on 139 reviews. The 'Notes From Campus' section provides updates on campus events. The 'Student Journals' section features a journal entry by Victoria Fortune and Sarah Spoto.

**Study Abroad in Florence: Overview**

In Florence, artistic, cultural and historic richness is ever present. With the Pitti Palace, Piazza della Signoria, Accademia and San Marco creating a wonderful backdrop, it is no surprise that walking along the Arno River you come across artists attempting to capture this beautiful city.

[Get a Catalog](#) [Apply Online](#)

**Program at a glance**

- Academic year, fall or spring semester ([summer session also available](#))
- Open to college sophomores, juniors and seniors (Students must have a minimum age of 18 by the application deadline)
- 2.5 minimum GPA required
- [Program fee includes](#) tuition, housing, some meals, excursions and cultural activities, trips to Venice and Rome, and more. Optional travel package available.
- [Courses](#) include art history, communications, economics, history, international business, international relations, literature, marketing, music, philosophy, photography, political science, religion, sociology, and studio art, as well as Italian language and culture
- No previous Italian language study required. Mandatory Italian language preparation during orientation through the University of Pisa in Viareggio (fall) or Società Dante Alighieri in Siena (spring). In addition all

**Online CHAT** Questions? Chat live online with an advisor or call toll-free (800) 727-2437.

**Student Reviews** ★★★★★ 4.7 (based on 139 student reviews)

**Notes From Campus** Find out what's happening on campus. Read about events, trips, tips and more! [Check It Out](#)

**Student Journals** Victoria Fortune and Sarah Spoto AIFS in Florence, Italy [Read Journal](#)

Figure 4: AIFS “Overview at a Glance” tab

The researcher also recommends including information in this section about the majority and minority races/ethnicities *within* the country as well as information on the predominant religions *within* the country.

Another recommendation is to add a paragraph in the “Beyond the Classroom” section for each program to explain that religious resources, LGBTQ resources and resources for disabilities are available at each of the program locations.

Home > Italy > Florence > Fall 2011 and Spring 2012

## Study Abroad in Florence: Beyond the Classroom

From Florence, you can easily explore the unspoiled beauty of Tuscany's rolling hills and valleys, dotted with tall cypress, olive groves and Chianti vineyards. You can venture further north to Milan, one of the fashion capitals of the world, and where the operas of Donizetti, Puccini and Verdi are performed. Or travel south to Naples to see Mount Vesuvius and explore the archaeological ruins at Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Learning does not begin or end in the classroom. To help you get a true taste of Italian culture, Richmond staff organizes an excellent program of cultural and social activities and advise students on how to get the most from life in Florence. Past activities have included:

- Exchange conversation program with Italian students
- Visits to sites around Florence including:
  - museums
  - art galleries
  - churches
  - theaters
- Italian cooking classes
- Dinners and parties with Italian students

Visits to Venice and Rome are included in the fee. Since full-year students do not repeat the orientation program or trips to Venice and Rome, they are free to travel independently at their own expense during these periods.

**Online CHAT** Questions? Chat live on call toll-free

**Student Reviews**  
★★★★★ 4.7  
(based on 139 student reviews)

**NEWS** **Notes From**  
Find out what's Read about eve more!

**Student Journals**

- Victoria Fortune and AIFS in Florence, Italy [Read Journal](#)
- Allison Bender AIFS in Florence, Italy Arizona State University [Read Journal](#)
- Nicole Watt AIFS in Florence, Italy University of California

Figure 5: AIFS “Beyond the Classroom” tab

It is important to let students know that AIFS does have these resources available for them.

3. The AIFS Resident Directors should provide more information and resources to students *before* departure regarding the cultural norms of the host country, racial and religious majority/minorities within the country, LGBTQ resources within the country, and specific things to be aware of upon arrival.

From the AIFS Alumni survey and follow up phone interviews, it is evident that students want to know more general information about their host country as well as the resources that will be available to them while abroad prior to departure. However, from the literature review and

the research findings, it is apparent that lack of information is a problem, especially for diverse students. Oftentimes there is information available, but only for those who are actively seeking it.

Integrating into a country first-hand is often the richest type of learning experience for students. One could argue that some of this information (cultural norms, information on racial and religious majority/minorities, LGBTQ resources, etc.) is best learned while abroad. However, the alumni interviews suggest that it would greatly benefit students to provide them with more general information about their host country before departure.

This information should come directly from the AIFS Resident Directors. Some Resident Directors do already send out pre-departure emails to students with logistical information. An additional email could be sent to students explaining the norms of the country including the racial and religious majority and minorities within the country, specific resources that will be available to them and important things to be aware of upon arrival. This will not only get students excited about their study abroad experience, but also encourage them to become familiar with the culture of their host country.

4. AIFS should increase its alumni efforts to expand the Alumni Ambassador Program as well as provide more information and resources to all students once they return home from abroad, specifically about reverse culture shock.

It is evident that creating a strong alumni network is becoming a popular trend in the study abroad field. Some competitors have re-entry programs for students returning from abroad that include information on reverse culture shock, how to deal with it, leveraging the study abroad experience and how to become a peer mentor.

AIFS created an Alumni Ambassador program in 2010 that provides alumni the opportunity to become more involved with AIFS and share their study abroad experience with other students. The goal of this program is to encourage new students to take part in the life-changing experience of studying abroad. Some of the Ambassador Program activities include presenting to classes, clubs or organizations about studying abroad with AIFS, writing articles for the AIFS newsletter, assisting with the AIFS table at study abroad affairs, hanging posters on campus, and hosting an information table on campus. AIFS also encourages student alumni to be creative to develop strategies that will be effective on their campuses. This program has been successful so far, but in order to remain competitive AIFS must increase its efforts regarding alumni.

Who knows the AIFS program better than someone who has already participated? Alumni know the country, the culture, the staff, the program, the classes, things to do outside of the classroom, and where to eat and have fun, which makes them an invaluable resource. As a result, AIFS should increase efforts to develop a strong alumni network. The first step will be to focus more on expanding the Alumni Ambassador program that will increase word of mouth advertising. Utilizing alumni offers AIFS the best word of mouth advertising at very little cost to the company. Most alumni are willing to help for free; they will gladly talk to anyone about their great experience abroad.

The researcher also recommends that AIFS identifies alumni that would be willing to talk to students about specific diversity issues. For example, if a student is concerned about LGBTQ issues while abroad, there would be designated alumni willing to talk or email about his/her experience. Despite the host country, students may find comfort in knowing others have gone



through a similar experience and having this resource would be not only be beneficial for prospective students, but also show AIFS' commitment to providing quality support.

Additionally, AIFS should focus on connecting with students after they return home from studying abroad by providing relevant information and resources. Reverse culture shock is a very common issue that a majority of students experience at some point after returning home. The AIFS staff abroad does provide students with information about it before students leave the host country. However, many students admitted that they did not pay attention to this information before they left their host country because they did not think it would affect them. It is important for the AIFS staff abroad to convey to students the importance of reading and understanding the effects of reverse culture shock and how to deal with it.

Many alumni reported in the follow-up phone interviews that they did not even realize they were experiencing reverse culture shock and that it would have been helpful to receive this information again once they were settled in back at home. The AIFS Stamford staff should provide all alumni with information on reverse culture shock after they return home. This could be in the form of an email or invitation to visit the AIFS website where there will be information on reverse culture shock.

Additional resources AIFS could provide to all alumni are how to leverage your study abroad experience, how to include it on your resume as well as how to discuss what you learned from the experience in a job interview.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The researcher developed focus group questions for the AIFS staff in the U.S. The researcher recommends AIFS conduct a focus group with staff in the U.S. in the future to review

current practices with respect to diversity issues as well as determine ways the staff can be better prepared to handle sensitive questions.

The researcher also recommends that further research be conducted on how to better educate students about the anti-American sentiment abroad and constructive ways to deal with it. Future research should consider the country, culture and the current perception of the U.S. in the global community.

### **Summary**

As the number of students studying abroad each year increases, it is essential for international educators to continue to improve information and resources provided to students before departure and while abroad. This study has demonstrated that it is essential for AIFS to provide more information to students before departure regarding culture shock, homesickness, and the anti-American sentiment while abroad as well as general information about the culture of their host country. AIFS must also inform students before departure that they will be provided more information about diversity resources while abroad such as religious resources and LGBTQ resources. Finally, it is critical for AIFS to increase its alumni efforts in addition to offering students relevant information after they return home from studying abroad specifically regarding reverse culture shock and how they can leverage the study abroad experience.

### References

- Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship* (2011). Retrieved October 15, 2011, from IIE.org: <http://www.iie.org/en/Programs/Gilman-Scholarship-Program>
- Berkowitz, A. (2011). *The Social Norms Approach*. Retrieved October 20, 2011, from Alan Berkowitz: [http://www.alanberkowitz.com/articles/social\\_norms.pdf](http://www.alanberkowitz.com/articles/social_norms.pdf)
- Brux, J. M., & Fry, B. (2010). Multicultural students in study abroad: their interests, their issues, and their constraints. *Journal of Students in International Education* , 14 (5), 508-527.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Diverse Issues in Higher Education (2009, November 16). *Study abroad participation up, except among minority students*. Retrieved October 15, 2011, from DiversePodium.com: <http://www.diversepodium.com/?p=13193>
- Diverse Staff (2011, January 20). *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. Retrieved October 2, 2011, from DiverseEducation.com: <http://diverseeducation.com/article/14642/>
- DiversityAbroad.com (2009). *Religious diversity for study abroad*. Retrieved October 9, 2011, from DiversityAbroad.com: <http://www.diversityabroad.com/religious->
- DiversityAbroad.com (2009). *Sexual orientation abroad for GLBT students*. Retrieved October 4, 2011, from DiversityAbroad.com: <http://www.diversityabroad.com/sexual-orientation-abroad>
- Global Experiences (2010). *About LGBT internships*. Retrieved October 8, 2011, from Global Experiences: [http://www.globalexperiences.com/careers/lgbt\\_internships.php](http://www.globalexperiences.com/careers/lgbt_internships.php)
- Helpful Study Abroad and Travel Resources* (2011). Retrieved October 15, 2011, from Brown University Office of International Programs: [http://www.brown.edu/Administration/OIP/pdf\\_docs/diversity\\_st\\_abroad01.pdf](http://www.brown.edu/Administration/OIP/pdf_docs/diversity_st_abroad01.pdf)

Institute of International Education (2010). *Open Doors Data*. Retrieved October 23, 2011, from iie.org: [http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-](http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/~media/Files/Corporate/Open-Doors/Fast-Facts/Fast%20Facts%202010.ashx)

[Doors/Data/~media/Files/Corporate/Open-Doors/Fast-Facts/Fast%20Facts%202010.ashx](http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/~media/Files/Corporate/Open-Doors/Fast-Facts/Fast%20Facts%202010.ashx)

Institute of International Education (2010). *Students with Disabilities, 2008/09*. Retrieved October 20, 2011, from IIE: <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Students-with-Disabilities/2008-09>

Katz, E. (2007, September- October). *Student with disabilities studying abroad*. Retrieved October 20, 2011, from NAFSA: [http://nafsa.org/\\_/File/\\_/educationabroad\\_iesept\\_oct.pdf](http://nafsa.org/_/File/_/educationabroad_iesept_oct.pdf)

Mills, A. (2009, March 20). *Report highlights challenges of expanding study-abroad opportunities in the middle east*. Retrieved October 9, 2011, from The Chronicle of Higher Education: <http://chronicle.com.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/article/Report-Highlights-Challenges/47125/>

Mobility International USA (2007, May). *The Value of Study Abroad*. Retrieved October 11, 2011, from Mobility International USA: <http://www.miusa.org/publications/books/communitycolleges/valuestudyabroad/?searchterm=the%20value%20of%20study%20abroad>

Monaghan, P. (1994, June 15). *Study abroad for minority students*. Retrieved October 1, 2011, from The Chronicle of Higher Education: <http://chronicle.com.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/article/Study-Abroad-for-Minority/93173/>

NAFSA (2001). *NAFSA 2001: providing resources for outbound students*. Retrieved October 8, 2011, from Indiana University:

[http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/nafsa\\_2001\\_presen.htm](http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/nafsa_2001_presen.htm)

NAFSA (2011). *Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Act*. Retrieved October 15, 2011, from

NAFSA.org: [http://www.nafsa.org/public\\_policy.sec/commission\\_on\\_the\\_abraham/](http://www.nafsa.org/public_policy.sec/commission_on_the_abraham/)

NAFSA (2010). *Study Abroad for All: Identifying, Recruiting & Supporting Underrepresented Groups*. Retrieved October 23, 2011, from NAFSA.org:

[http://am.nafsa.org/knowledge\\_community\\_network.sec/education\\_abroad\\_1/education\\_abroad\\_2/document\\_library\\_7/marketing\\_and\\_3/study\\_abroad\\_for\\_all](http://am.nafsa.org/knowledge_community_network.sec/education_abroad_1/education_abroad_2/document_library_7/marketing_and_3/study_abroad_for_all)

Norton, I. (2008, September 26). *Changing the face of study abroad*. Retrieved October 1, 2011, from <http://chronicle.com.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/article/Changing-the-Face-of-Study/25788/>

Public Agenda (2011). *Countries where homosexuality is illegal*. Retrieved October 30, 2011, from PublicAgenda.org: <http://www.publicagenda.org/charts/countries-where-homosexuality-illegal>

Rainbow SIG (2011). Retrieved October 2, 2011, from Indiana University Overseas LesBiGay: <http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/>

Roberts, L. (2009, October 11). *Have wheelchair, will travel: disabled students study abroad, too*. Retrieved October 20, 2011, from The Chronicle of Higher Education: <http://chronicle.com.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/article/Students-With-Disability-Study/48740/>

Roebert Gutierrez, A. H. (2009). *Expanding U.S. study abroad in the arab world: challenges and opportunities*. New York: Institute of International Education.

- Schmidt, P. (2010, September 20). *Race plays key role in decision to study abroad or to stay home, study finds*. Retrieved October 2, 2011, from <http://chronicle.com.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/article/Race-Plays-Key-Role-in/124549/>
- Sociology Guide (2011). *Social Norms*. Retrieved October 20, 2011 , from Sociology Guide: <http://www.sociologyguide.com/basic-concepts/Social-Norms.php>
- Tillman, M. (2010). *Diversity in International Education Workshop Summary Report*. Washington, D.C.: National Press Club.
- U.S. Department of State (2011). *About Fulbright*. Retrieved October 23, 2011, from Fulbright International Educational Exchange Program: <http://fulbright.state.gov/history/sen-fulbright/quotations>

## Appendix A

### Email request to AIFS Student Alumni

Hello! My name is Emily Sweeney and I currently work at the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) as the College Study Abroad Admissions Officer for the AYS Italy programs. I am also a graduate student at Drexel University. I am conducting research on studying abroad to complete my Master of Science in Global and International Education.

You have been identified as a participant for this study based on your status as an AIFS alum. The data collection process for the study will be through an online survey (link provided below). The questions are about your study abroad experience. Completion of the survey should take no more than 10 minutes.

The information collected in this survey holds minimal risk to the participant and institution. The survey tool utilizes encryption to protect the privacy of the respondents. The results collected will be reported in aggregate form only. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants can discontinue participation at any time without consequence.

If you would be willing to participate in this study, please proceed to the online survey at the link below. The survey will be available from January XX through January XX.

For more information about this research study, please contact me at [esweeney@aifs.com](mailto:esweeney@aifs.com). For questions about your rights as a subject in this research, contact the Drexel University Institutional Review Board. Please note this survey is an academic endeavor and does not reflect any current programming plans at AIFS.

I sincerely appreciate your help in my research!

Survey link (to be added at a later date)

Thank you for your time.

Best,  
Emily Sweeney

**Appendix B****Survey for AIFS Alumni**

1. Where did you study abroad (host country)? (check all that apply)  

<input type="checkbox"/> Australia	<input type="checkbox"/> Costa Rica	<input type="checkbox"/> India	<input type="checkbox"/> Russia
<input type="checkbox"/> Austria	<input type="checkbox"/> Czech Republic	<input type="checkbox"/> Ireland	<input type="checkbox"/> South Africa
<input type="checkbox"/> Brazil	<input type="checkbox"/> England	<input type="checkbox"/> Italy	<input type="checkbox"/> Spain
<input type="checkbox"/> Chile	<input type="checkbox"/> France	<input type="checkbox"/> New Zealand	<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-Country
<input type="checkbox"/> China	<input type="checkbox"/> Germany	<input type="checkbox"/> Peru	
  
2. How long did you study abroad for? (check all that apply)  
☐ 1 semester  
☐ 2 semesters  
☐ 3 semesters  
☐ summer (3-12 weeks)
  
3. How did you find out about AIFS?  
☐ Study abroad fair  
☐ Study abroad adviser/office  
☐ A friend or family member who participated on an AIFS program  
☐ Parent  
☐ Professor/Instructor  
☐ Sorority/Fraternity  
☐ A student group or association  
☐ AIFS website  
☐ Internet Search
  
4. I was a member of a racial/ethnic minority group **within** my host country.  
(*e.g. an African American student in Ireland*).  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
  
I was a member of a religious minority group **within** my host country.  
(*e.g. a Jewish student in Italy*).  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
  
I identify myself as an LGBTQ student (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning my sexuality).



☐ Yes

☐ No

I identify myself as a student with a physical, mental, learning or sensory disability.

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. Did you ever personally experience any of the following while abroad? (check all that apply)

☐ homesickness

☐ religious discrimination

☐ feeling “different” from the locals

☐ discrimination based on my nationality

☐ culture shock

☐ discrimination based on my sexuality

☐ gender discrimination

☐ discrimination based on my disability

☐ racial/ethnic discrimination

6. Please elaborate on any other challenges you faced while abroad.

7. What additional resources would have been useful to have before you went abroad?

☐ Information on the majority and minority races/ethnicities within the country I studied abroad

☐ Religious resources while abroad (e.g. churches, groups, etc.)

☐ LGBTQ resources while abroad (e.g. LGBTQ groups, LGBTQ friendly areas, businesses, etc.)

☐ Information on culture shock

☐ Religious minority resources while abroad (e.g. religious groups, businesses catering to religious minorities)

☐ Resources for disabilities

8. What information relating to diversity (racial, religious, LGBTQ, disabilities) do you wish you knew before you studied abroad?

9. To what extent was the AIFS staff sensitive to your concerns relating to diversity?

☐ Very sensitive

- ☐ Somewhat sensitive
- ☐ Sensitive
- ☐ Somewhat insensitive
- ☐ Very Insensitive

10. Please describe any instance(s) where the AIFS staff addressed your concerns relating to diversity.

I would be willing to be contacted by Emily to participate in a short follow-up phone interview. My identity will remain confidential.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

(if student clicks yes, he/she will be taken to an online form to fill out the following information)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C**

### **Follow-Up Phone Interview Protocol for AIFS Student Alumni**

Thank student for allowing me to interview him/her. Explain a little bit about my research.

1. How did you decide to study abroad? How did you find out about AIFS?
2. What concerns did you have about studying abroad? (e.g. financial, cultural, family, language barrier, discrimination, etc.)
3. How did you decide on a program location?
4. Did you research your host country before you applied? Before you went abroad?
5. Did you ever feel like you were treated differently or discriminated against while abroad because of your (race, religion, sexuality, disability, gender, nationality, etc.)? By locals? Other students?
6. Can you think of any other specific challenges you faced with respect to diversity while abroad?
7. Thinking back, what information with respect to being a diverse student would you have liked to know before you went abroad?
8. Where and when would you have liked to see this information? (e.g. AIFS website, handbook, pre-departure presentation, pre-departure email from Admissions Officer, pre-departure email from Resident Director, during Orientation abroad, in the AIFS office abroad, etc.)
9. Did you feel comfortable asking your Admissions Officer/Resident Director & Staff abroad personal questions? Relating to diversity?

10. How did the AIFS staff support you with respect to being a diverse student? (e.g. answering sensitive questions, providing additional accommodations, providing additional resources, offering suggestions of places to go, etc.)
11. What advice about studying abroad would you give a student with a similar background?
12. Any additional comments or suggestions?

## Appendix D

### Email Request to SECUSS-L

Dear SECUSS-L colleagues,

I work at the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) as the College Study Abroad Admissions Officer for the AYS Italy programs. I am also a graduate student at Drexel University. I am conducting research on attracting and preparing diverse students (racial minority students, religious minority students, LGBTQ students and students with disabilities) for study abroad to complete my Master of Science in Global and International Education.

I am particularly interested in determining the current practices at institutions to attract these underrepresented groups and prepare them for studying abroad. I would greatly appreciate if you could please take a moment and respond to the following questions. **Do not post your responses on the listserve; please send your responses directly to me at [esweeney@aifs.com](mailto:esweeney@aifs.com).** All responses will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be reported. I will summarize and share the summary results only. Thank you in advance for your participation.

#### Definition of Diverse students:

*Racial Minority Students* – students who are a member of a racial minority group within their host country

*Religious Minority Students* – students who are a member of a religious minority group within their host country

*LGBTQ Students* – students who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning their sexuality

*Students with Disabilities* – students who have a physical, mental, learning or sensory disability

1. At your institution, how do you currently promote and attract diverse students to study abroad?
2. Does your institution offer any additional resources or support for diverse students who are interested in studying/interning abroad? (i.e. brochures, websites, additional pre-departure presentation information, advisers who have experience working with diverse students, etc.)
3. Does your institution offer any additional resources or support for diverse students while they are abroad?

Thank you for your time and helping me with my research!

Best,  
Emily Sweeney

## Appendix E

### Email Interview for AIFS Resident Directors

Dear Resident Directors,

My name is Emily Sweeney and I work in the AIFS Stamford, CT office as the AYS Admissions Officer for the Italy programs. I am also a graduate student at Drexel University. I am conducting research for my thesis on attracting and preparing diverse students (racial minority students, religious minority students, LGBTQ students and students with disabilities) for study abroad to complete my Master of Science in Global and International Education.

I am particularly interested in determining what we currently do at AIFS to attract these underrepresented groups and prepare them for studying/internships abroad and how we can improve the AIFS website, marketing materials and pre-departure information for students. I would greatly appreciate if you could please take a moment and respond to the following questions.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may choose not to respond to each of the questions below without consequence. If you choose to respond, your responses will be kept confidential and nothing you write will be connected to you individually in the report.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

#### **Please read the following definition of diverse students before answering the questions.**

##### **Diverse students:**

*Racial Minority Students* – students who are a member of a racial minority group within their host country

*Religious Minority Students* – students who are a member of a religious minority group within their host country

*LGBTQ Students* – students who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning their sexuality

*Students with Disabilities* – students who have a physical, mental, learning or sensory disability

1. At your program location, which of the following groups do you often have the most students from? Racial minorities, religious minorities, LGBTQ students, students with disabilities.

2. How do you currently address the needs of diverse students? (e.g. provide information to all students, provide information 1 on 1 to students who have specific questions)
3. In what ways and when do you provide information to students? (e.g. during Orientation, one on one meetings with students, handbook, newsletters, etc.)
4. In what specific ways do you train your staff to be sensitive to issues relating to diversity? Is there someone in your office designated to handle these sensitive questions/issues?
5. Do you offer any additional resources or support for diverse students *prior* to departure?
6. Do you offer any additional resources or support for diverse students while they are abroad?
7. Can you think of a specific example where you had to go above and beyond to accommodate a student's needs with respect to diversity?

Any additional information you could provide on this topic would be most helpful (e.g. websites or resources in your country relating to racial minorities, religious minorities, LGBTQ community and people with disabilities) that you think may be useful for students to know about.

Thank you for your time and helping me with my research!

Best,  
Emily Sweeney



## **Appendix F**

### **Focus Group Questions for AIFS Staff in the U.S.**

**Focus Group Moderator: Emily Sweeney**

**Date:**

#### **Focus Group Questions**

1. What are we currently doing to promote and attract diverse students to study abroad on AIFS programs? Can you think of any additional ways we could reach these underrepresented populations?
2. How are we preparing diverse students for studying abroad? Is there any general or program specific pre-departure information that we provide to students relating to issues concerning diversity? Culture shock? Discrimination? Resources for LGBTQ students?
3. How do you think we can improve the AIFS website to add additional resources for diverse students? Where (i.e. website, handbook, pre-departure presentation, pre-departure email, student portal) and when (timing) would students find this information most useful?
4. How do we currently handle sensitive questions relating to diversity? Can you think of examples where you had to deal with a sensitive issue? Did you feel prepared to handle it? Do the Admissions Officers try to answer them? Refer them to our supervisor? Refer them to the Resident Director/staff abroad?
5. Do you feel prepared to handle sensitive questions relating to diversity? What can we do to better prepare ourselves for these types of questions and situations that come up?
6. How can we encourage students to feel comfortable asking the Admissions Officers these types of sensitive question relating to diversity (racial, religious, sexuality, disabilities)?

Is it best to provide information relating to diversity to all students on our website so they do not have to ask for it? Program specific/only to accepted students?