



GLBTQA and Study Abroad Workshop: A Pre-Departure Pilot Program

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Background

Five graduate students at the University of Minnesota developed a study abroad pre-departure session as an interactive workshop specifically for the whole GLBT community and its allies. The workshop was piloted in November 2011.

Key Points from the Literature

Study Abroad Facts

- In 2009-10, over 270,000 U.S. college students participated in study abroad
- 22.3% majored in social sciences
- 20.8% majored in business and management
- 12.9% majored in STEM fields
- 8.3% majored in fine or applied arts

Factors that increase likelihood of study abroad participation:

- Openness to diverse people and ideas
- Student participation in co-curricular activities
- Positive perception of study abroad experience

GLBT Campus Climate Studies

- 77% have received verbal insults
- 27% have been threatened with physical violence
- 19% fear for personal safety
- fear of discrimination abroad is a detracting factor in potential study abroad participation
- higher levels of engagement in art and music activities than straight peers
- engage in more discussions about socio-cultural issues with peers

GLBT Sexual Orientation Identity Development

- Several development models include a social component
- Notion of “self concept” when internal sense of self is affirmed by the way others view the individual
- Affective, cognitive and behavioral elements
- Heightened awareness of social and cultural environment in relation to identity visibility

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GLBTQA and Study Abroad Workshop

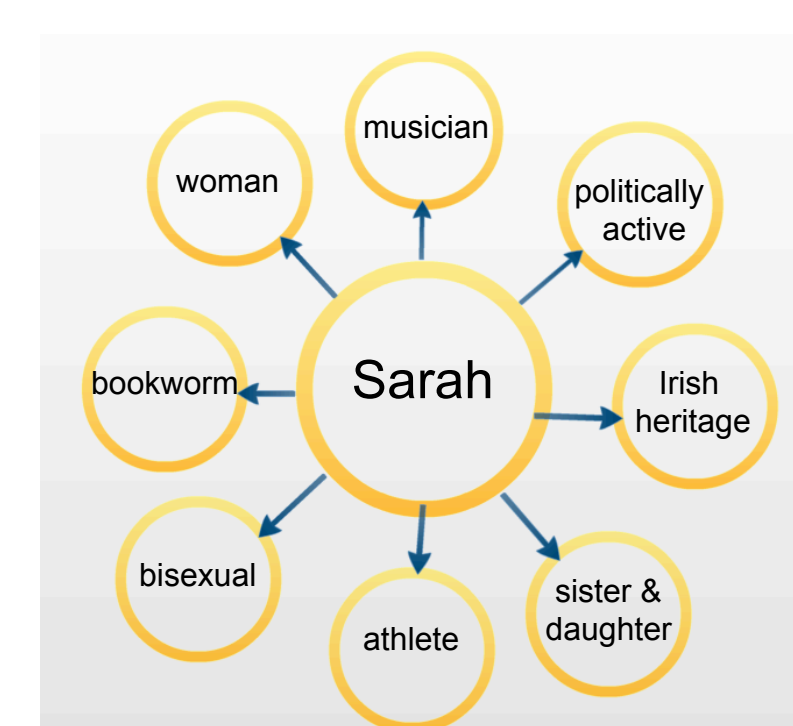
Structure of the Workshop

The Workshop is designed to be a single 3 hour session, delivered in-person, and intended to be as interactive as possible to help build trust and community within the participant group. Facilitated by Annika Bowers, Elizabeth Hedin, Heather Keelon, and Maren Stoddard.

Workshop Activities

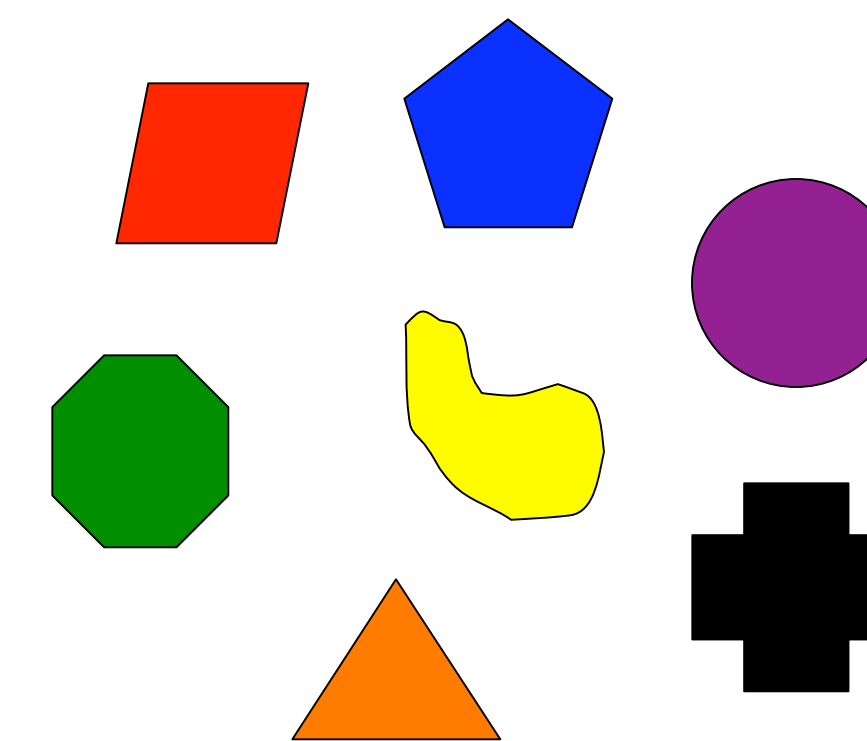
1. The Tag Game

This is an icebreaker activity during which students wear paper tags of a various shapes and colors and then are asked to form groups without using any verbal communication. The activity stimulates discussion on in-group/out-group dynamics and how appearance or visibility of a characteristic may affect inclusion.



2. Word Rose

Word Rose is a personal reflection activity to allow students to think about which parts of their identity are important to them. The discussion of the activity revolves around which parts of identity might be easy or difficult to translate into another cultural environment. It can also help highlight how some aspects of identity are visible or invisible.



3. Critical Incidents

This Critical Incidents are used as a tool to present participants with an array of realistic situations that may be encountered in a study abroad experience. The five different Critical Incidents give students the chance to explore GLBT issues and challenges that may be present in another country and discuss ideas and strategies to handle new cultural situations.

Critical Incident # 2
Dating a local in the Middle East/Africa

Ryan has been studying abroad in Tunisia for two months. He is openly gay back home at New York University, and has kept a relatively low profile while abroad. He started seeing Naoufel, a young Tunisian man, after meeting him at a cafe.

Ryan and Naoufel spent the night dancing at a club, and took a taxi to return to his apartment around two in the morning. On the way there, their taxi was stopped at a police checkpoint. The police looked at identification, and then started to harass Naoufel before ordering him out of the car. They accused him of being a prostitute and made several homophobic remarks. In the meantime, Ryan watches from the taxi, unsure about what to do – he is afraid for his new boyfriend and for himself.

If you were Ryan, how would you react? (Rank order of preference from 1 (high) to 5 (low))

- ☐ Immediately get out of the car, ask for the officers' identification, and threaten them
- ☐ Stay silent and hope that Naoufel is not arrested
- ☐ Tell the police that he will call his embassy
- ☐ Lie to the police about the nature of their relationship
- ☐ Offer the police money to stop harassing Naoufel

4. Zoom

The activity Zoom uses illustrations from the book *ZOOM*, by Istvan Banyai (1995). Each participant is given one or two images and, after looking at the details of the pictures, asked to put all the pictures in order. Discussion of this activity aims to reinforce that, just as each of the pictures represents a part of the whole story, any part of their identity, including sexual orientation, can play as large or as small a part of their experience abroad as the student wishes.

5. Region-Specific Information

This section of the Workshop is to give participants time to work together with other students who will study in the same country or region to share and find information and resources that may help them as a GLBT person abroad. It's also an opportunity for students to network with other study abroad participants in the GLBT community.

6. Wrap-Up

Wrap-up is used to revisit the Word Rose, reflect on the activities and think about what goals each person has for study abroad and how identity may factor into those goals and expectations.

References

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Context: U of MN Twin Cities

- The University of Minnesota Twin Cities sent over 1,700 students abroad in 2008-09 and the number is increasing
- Online study abroad resources and Learning Abroad GLBTA Network (peer-to-peer support program) offered by Learning Abroad Center and GLBTA Programs Office
- Partnering offices in the pilot process:
 - GLBTA Programs Office
 - Learning Abroad Center
 - Support from instructor Dr. Barbara Kappler

Successes

- Participants: 6
 - These participants had not decided when they would study abroad, but were interested in GLBT issues in a study abroad environment
- Filled a gap in in-person pre-departure programming for the GLBT community at the U of MN Twin Cities
- The optional nature of the workshop, open to all students, creates higher likelihood of participant interest in the issues and greater participant engagement
- Creates a long-term program template and opportunity for similar programs for under-represented and less visible groups of students in study abroad

Recommendations for the Future

- In order to reach a wider audience, creating an online version of the presentation has potential to include those with schedule conflicts and/or those who feel uncomfortable attending an in-person event relating to GLBT issues.
- Include past study abroad participants from the GLBT community who can speak about their own experiences
- This Workshop lacks information about the Transgender community and its needs. Creating a Critical Incident about a transgender student and including more information for transgender issues abroad would be ideal.

Thank you!

