

Opportunity,

Dealing with Anti-Americanism Abroad

NUMEROUS U.S. INSTITUTIONS of higher education have strategies in place to internationalize their campuses, and many of those strategies include plans to increase the number of U.S. students who study overseas. Yet at the time those strategies were conceived planners had not foreseen what has in the past two years become a serious obstacle: anti-American sentiment in study abroad.

In spring 2003, many educators, including internationally oriented ones, were caught off guard by the morning program (*Today Show*, March 17, 2003) that broadcast interviews of nervous parents concerned for the welfare of their children studying overseas with the pending Iraq crisis. The interview concluded with a leading risk analyst discussing the “largely unregulated” study abroad industry, fueling the fears of most parents tuned in that morning. Much has happened in these past two years. Sadly, world events have not improved the situation. Whether real or perceived, anti-American sentiment is a factor that can’t be ignored in the wider study abroad picture.

Yet, in spite of these difficulties it is certainly not a time to back down; study abroad and efforts to increase such programs should continue. For several years now, the need to increase U.S. student study abroad participation has been discussed and advocated. The reasons why this growth must occur, and the best approaches for moving it forward, are detailed in policy papers, such as the 2003 NAFSA task force report *Securing America’s Future: Global Education for a Global Age*. In a fitting summary of the situation, the paper says: “We desper-

ately need to understand other countries and other cultures—friend and foe alike. We are unnecessarily putting ourselves at risk because of our stubborn monolingualism and ignorance of the world” (NAFSA 2003).

U.S. educational institutions must be proactive in dealing with anti-American sentiment, and be transparent in sharing their practices with participants, faculty, and parents to continue growing and promoting study abroad in the current world climate. In this way professionals in the field will advance intercultural learning and educate the next generation of “world citizens.” These efforts must occur in the planning and administration stages, in the student preparation, and on site during study abroad programs.

At Issue— Defining and Assessing Undue Risk

Study abroad programs exist first and foremost to educate students. Program providers want to present students with the best possible learning environment so that they can reach their educational goals and all parties can attain the goals of the program. This necessitates careful consideration of the safety and security

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Not Threat

Although a strengthening anti-Americanism in many parts of the world does require appropriate risk assessment, it should present invaluable teachable moments for education abroad programs.

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risks of such programs (Hoffa 1998, SAFETI Web site). Study abroad programs and their sponsoring institutions have an obligation to operate in a reasonable and prudent manner that does not expose students, faculty, and staff to undue risk. The main difficulty in today's security-conscious and ever-changing world environment is defining and assessing undue risk. This will have different meanings for different institutions, depending on the organization's philosophies, history, experience, extent of overseas engagement, and characteristics of the student body and administration. An additional challenge is determining the degree to which anti-American sentiment, and resulting actions, could impact the program's ability to operate prudently. The impact could necessitate considerations of approaches to orientation and student support, policies regarding student travel or participation in particular types of activities, major program elements (such as student housing), or whether to run the program at all.

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On a national level, the increased concern for safety since September 11, 2001, has encouraged an air of cautiousness and there is a heightened awareness of the risks associated with studying abroad. U.S. foreign policy during the past several years has engendered more vocal opposition in many locations worldwide, adding to perceptions that living, studying, and traveling abroad brings particular safety concerns for U.S. citizens. With this increased concern, study abroad programs must consider likely manifestations of anti-American sentiment at the program site. This, in turn, will inform the program's revised risk assessment and subsequent impact on policy and practice. In making such determinations, the institution must first assess what characteristics of the program may make students more or less vulnerable to encountering anti-American sentiment that would negatively impact their study abroad experience. Examples include the extent of supervision of students by program staff, student housing arrangements, amount of unstructured time in a typical student's schedule, and the degree of integration of the program and students in the host community.

Generating scenarios of the probable impact of anti-American sentiment or actions on the study abroad program, concentrating on

situations that students are most likely to come across, will give program decision makers the clearest picture of necessary steps. However, while consideration of a reasonable range of possibilities in risk assessment is prudent, it can be counterproductive to the program's goals to implement restrictive policies designed to mitigate even unlikely situations. Along with situations that students are likely to encounter during the program, consideration must also be given to high-risk activities, actions, and locations that students might actively engage in. From these situations and activities, steps can be taken to moderate risk through refining policy and practice, redesigning pre-departure and initial student orientation, creating different kinds of on-site activities, identifying resources for student support, and providing training for program staff. Contingency plans must also be modified or developed to include the likely consequences of anti-Americanism, both at the site-specific and international levels.

Coinciding with the heightened awareness of possible risk to students abroad, many colleges and universities in the United States are feeling the pressure to articulate their risk threshold, and to be conservative when doing so. Some university administrations are becoming more cautious about study abroad, and it is not uncommon for policies to be adopted that make it difficult for students to participate in study abroad programs located in areas deemed riskier than other areas. At some schools, students may not study in a country with a current U.S. Department of State (DOS) public announcement or travel warning. At others, students may have to petition to study in such locations. Many schools still make this decision on a case-by-case basis, depending, in part, on the characteristics and reputation of the program in which the student wishes to participate.

Study abroad programs may be faced with the question of whether to run at all. The meanings of long-standing benchmarks that have traditionally been used to judge the security risks in a particular location, such as DOS travel warnings, are changing. Travel warnings and public announcements are meant to be informative, not definitive when considering the probable exposure and risk to students and program staff. Further, these notices are meant to serve a wide audience, from long-term residents of a particular place to the casual traveler who may be going on his first holiday abroad. Therefore, the issuance of a travel warning or public announcement for a particular country does not automatically mean that it is unsafe for foreign students. General "worldwide cautions" detailing DOS concerns regarding possible terrorist attacks or anti-American violence have been constantly in effect since mid-September 2001. It is necessary, therefore, for study abroad programs to develop new benchmarks and methods to assess overall risk to participants.

Toward a Framework for Holistic Risk Assessment

When a travel warning is issued for a location where study abroad programs regularly operate, there is often a flurry of informal analysis regarding the severity of the language used in the warning, or

speculations about other unspoken factors that may have influenced its creation. Without facts to back these up, these analyses rest in the realm of ideas, and do not carry much credibility. It is incumbent upon study abroad programs to take immediate action to gather more information from credible sources. With a full picture of the situation, programs will be able to make an informed decision about whether to operate under the conditions that currently exist at the program's location. Such a framework would include:

- Information from U.S. government sources, including specific information from travel warnings, public announcements, and country profiles. Information from U.S. government in-country representatives is also quite valuable. Viewpoints of U.S. embassies or consulates in the country, along with perspectives from other agencies, such as the Peace Corps or USAID, should be considered. This information should be readily shared among study abroad programs in the same location.

- Steps being taken by local authorities. If a particular incident or set of circumstances is contributing to possible safety concerns, what has been the reaction of the local and national authorities? Are there particular demands from the United States or the international community that the country will not or cannot meet? What steps has the local or national government taken? How are they viewing the situation?

- Other nations' perspectives. Find out what actions other nations are taking, including those that are friendly and less friendly to the host country and to the United States. Have other nations issued a statement of caution for the area? Look for both official action or statements and evidence of general concern, such as news in credible media outlets.

- Actions of similar organizations. If there are other study abroad programs operating in the area, what decisions have they made? Establishing a positive working relationship or collective decision-making protocols in advance will greatly facilitate this step. Agreeing to share information, or to divide up the information gathering based on each program's contact base, could greatly increase the perspectives available for the decisionmakers.

- Opinions of international organizations. These include international schools that operate in permanence in an area, businesses, international nonprofits or charitable organizations, religious entities, multinational corporations, or multinational organizations, such as the United Nations. Include those that operate in the specific locale, as well as those that operate in the region or at a larger scale.

- Local news from credible sources. Monitoring local news from a variety of sources can provide excellent information. It is important to look beyond the headlines to in-depth stories, opinion pieces, or analysis that might not make top billing. News and perspectives from local contacts and individuals who have worked with the program is also important to gather.

- The program's characteristics. Things to consider here include staff experience and training, basic program design and philosophy, num-

ber of participants, resources available to students and staff, and history of the program, in addition to things already mentioned such as student housing and degree of integration into host communities.

- The typical student body profile. What personal characteristics do students typically bring to the program? Age, previous experience abroad, range of interests, language skills and the like are important considerations.

- Monitoring requirements. If the program runs as scheduled, what level of monitoring is required, and what resources are available to do this? If circumstances were to change during the course of the program, procedures need to be in place for re-consideration of risk and possible program changes. The degree of oversight necessary, and the availability of this, should be a factor in determining the level of risk of the program.

Student Perspective from the Field

Anti-Americanism has become an all-inclusive phrase that can describe many different responses while telling us very little at all. Can it produce any sort of learning outcome for students or must program providers simply advise them to "stay clear" of any manifestations of this growing phenomenon? Professionals based overseas are fascinated by the reactions of U.S. citizens abroad to what is both perceived and actual anti-Americanism. It is incumbent upon international educators based overseas to help U.S. students not only encounter and understand "anti-Americanism," but to create a learning experience from it as well. This goal fits compatibly with the student's desire to learn about themselves and others as part of their study abroad experience.

Experience working in London with students currently representing a variety of U.S. colleges and universities provided an opportunity to understand anti-Americanism from the students' perspective. A survey instrument was created for this purpose, and results used to inform the design of a presentation created for and administered to U.S. study abroad students. All of these pieces fit part of a self-reinforcing cycle to improve the education of future U.S. students abroad about the learning potential of what may seem frightening and worrisome at first: anti-Americanism.

The Survey

The questionnaire was distributed to 82 students and 31 responses were received, a return rate of 38 percent. All of these students attend U.S. colleges or universities, participated in a London semester in either fall 2003 or spring 2004 and completed this survey at the end of their study abroad experience. Not all respondents are necessarily U.S. students although the vast majority fit this category and the few who are not U.S. students are often perceived as "U.S. Americans" by host nationals because of their study abroad group membership. Students were asked the same six questions regardless of their semester of participation apart from question #6 ("can such an encounter produce a learning experience") which was posed to

spring 2004 students only. Finally, it should be noted that three of the spring 2004 respondents attended the March 2004 workshop described later in this article, which may have affected their survey responses as they completed their survey in May 2004.

Although the student data is imperfect several interesting patterns emerged in their thoughts and ideas regarding anti-Americanism.

1. What is anti-Americanism? Their reaction to this question can be grouped into two basic explanations. Several felt it is a reaction to U.S. foreign policy and other U.S. government actions. As one student commented, “many British have said they are against American foreign policy—not Americans.” This sort of experience reflects the ability of host country nationals to de-personalize anti-Americanism by separating individuals from institutions and will hopefully encourage U.S. students to make the same distinctions. Several other students blamed anti-Americanism on stereotyping and general prejudice (often negative) regarding U.S. citizens. One student defined this as “a judgmental thing by people who discriminate against people because of their race, culture, or background.” Once again students are able to separate the individual and her uniqueness from general prejudice that is bound to be inaccurate when used to understand an individual U.S. citizen. This awareness is a powerful tool that can be used to lower defensiveness and increase learning.

2. Does anti-Americanism even exist? If so, what might be the causes? Nearly all respondents (97 percent) felt it does indeed exist. The most popular explanation (48 percent) given by students was the war in Iraq and U.S. foreign policy in general. This response is not surprising since much of the British media and the public have opposed the war, and the latter group has demonstrated several times against the British government for its involvement in the war (including a march of at least 750,000 people in February 2003). U.S. students in London are exposed to criticism of U.S. foreign policy in the papers, on the television, and in the streets.

Several students (20 percent) felt it exists only to a limited extent. As one student wrote “it is over exaggerated. I feel that in most cases if you treat the people that you are around with respect, they will reciprocate the gesture.” The single student surveyed who believes it does not exist wrote “I don’t see, in particular, anti-Americanism, but rather universal intolerance of difference.” These sorts of attitudes are important to promote among U.S. study abroad students in an attempt to help them understand what anti-Americanism may not be.

3. Have you encountered any anti-Americanism while studying here? This question was designed to make it personal and move the students away from generalizations about “others” to specific comments about their experience as a U.S. citizen abroad. Nearly half (43 percent) said they had experienced anti-American behavior, however a significant proportion of these (38 percent) felt their experience of anti-Americanism was very limited. The majority of all respondents (57 percent) said they had not experienced anti-Americanism personally. All responses provide useful examples for student workshops when trying to help students differentiate

between what may and may not be anti-Americanism.

On an interesting note, there was a tendency for some students to brand negative experiences the result of anti-Americanism. Rude waiters in Venice, muttering taxi drivers in Rome, being ignored when they asked for directions on a London street, eye rolls and dismissive gestures were all blamed by some on anti-Americanism. Yet it would seem these negative responses to students may have been because of the unique behavior of either the student or the local. Or perhaps both. Blaming it on anti-Americanism helps the student avoid personal responsibility as well as giving them an explanation for a reaction they do not fully understand. It also confuses perceived and actual anti-Americanism.

4. When should you engage with someone who expresses anti-American views? When not to? It is natural for international educators to grasp intercultural learning opportunities for students whenever possible, yet choosing an appropriate context is important. Students know this, too. Many wrote about the importance of engaging in a safe, comfortable, and controlled environment. They also stressed the value of sharing ideas with people who are open-minded and willing to listen. Students felt strongly that it would be unwise to engage in hostile, tension-filled situations with people who appear aggressive and overheated. They also recognized the danger of alcohol and that drunkenness is unlikely to promote open-minded attitudes. Safety comes first.

5. How can U.S. students constructively respond to anti-Americanism? Can you think of any specific ways to communicate in this sort of situation? This is the next step forward after determining some specific comment/behavior is truly anti-American and that the environment is safe for such a discussion. Student responses fell into four primary categories. Some felt that “actions speak louder than words” and addressed this sentiment with such comments as: “setting a positive example,” “be nice and prove them wrong with your actions,” and “live, work and prove that these ideas aren’t true.” Providing people with direct personal experiences that run counter to their preconceived stereotypes can make it difficult to maintain prejudice. This applies to British stereotypes about U.S. citizens just as well as it does to U.S. stereotypes about the British. It is a two-way street and makes use of a student’s desire to be judged as an individual to guide their perception and interpretation of other people from other cultures.

Students also noted the importance of timing and approach (as they did in question #4) as well as the need for mutual respect in any discussion centering on anti-Americanism. A fourth and final group of students (14 percent) felt it best to ignore any discussion of anti-Americanism. This is a valid approach and might be the best decision in some, many, or all such encounters depending on the context as well as the sender and receiver of the message. Students should never be told they must challenge and discuss anti-Americanism regardless of the circumstances and individuals involved. Engaging in such a discussion might be unsafe. Even if safety isn’t a concern, a discussion about anti-Americanism between two people

IN MAY 2003, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) issued a travel warning urging U.S. citizens to defer nonessential travel to Kenya, citing the possibility of terrorist threats against Western interests. Several other nations issued similar statements. During the two months following the issuance of the travel warning, international pressure was put on the relatively new administration in Kenya to increase anti-terrorism measures. Kenya responded by increasing security at and around all major airports, increasing security at popular public areas, such as shopping malls and city centers, improving safety on roadways, increasing training for police and security forces, and introducing anti-terrorism legislation in Parliament. DOS changed the wording of the travel warning, and most other countries lifted their travel advisories following these measures. The Peace Corps swore in 130 new volunteers for Kenya in August 2003. Since the DOS travel warning was still in effect, however, many study abroad programs, including SIT Study Abroad, faced the decision of whether to run programs in Kenya under the travel warning.

SIT Study Abroad suspended its two

Kenya programs for fall 2003, taking the time to gather and assess the information listed in the above framework. Meetings and consultations were held with officials of U.S. government interests in Kenya, managers at multinational organizations, international NGOs, U.S. corporations operating in Kenya, and other study abroad programs operating in Kenya and East Africa. Perspectives were gathered from many nations, via official positions posted on the Internet, information given by the country's embassy in Nairobi, and discussions with representatives in Kenya. News sources in Kenya and East Africa were monitored, and a log of relevant information was kept. An analysis of the program's characteristics was conducted, including assessment of student housing and means of travel throughout the program. All of this information was used to create a detailed risk assessment of operating the programs in Kenya. The decision was made that operating the programs as scheduled in a reasonable and prudent manner would not expose students, staff, or program contacts to unacceptable risk. Students, parents, home universities, and program contacts had been informed of the

process during the fall semester, and the decision was communicated quickly, in writing, to all concerned parties. Contingency and back-up plans were updated, and the two programs were closely monitored throughout the semester. They both ran successfully, without incident.

The current DOS worldwide caution states, "U.S. citizens are reminded to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness." The same applies to institutions running study abroad programs. By staying current with information, updating risk assessments, and revising policies and practice, study abroad programs can fulfill the mandate to operate in a reasonable and prudent manner by making informed decisions about their programs. Communicating these decisions and processes to staff, students, parents, and partners is an equally important obligation. Sharing key decision-making points as appropriate will help stakeholders understand the process, and can be a powerful modeling tool in teaching students to conduct their own risk assessments in relation to activities they may undertake individually while abroad.

or sides that are hardened in their attitudes and unwilling to listen to difference might simply cement the prejudice.

6. Can such an encounter produce a learning experience? This question was asked of the spring 2004 students only. It is the crux of the matter: can U.S. students overseas learn from anti-Americanism or should they just avoid the issue? It was satisfying to read the student responses of all those who responded that they could learn from such experiences. They see the benefit for intercultural learning and noted it can help us "see other people's views," "get a different perspective," and "open your eyes." It can also help us to understand ourselves. As some students noted it gives us a "chance to see the United States in a new light" and "helps us realize what we believe". This growing phenomenon of anti-Americanism is a learning opportunity from many students' perspective.

The Student Workshop

The final section of the survey attempted to gauge student interest in attending a workshop on anti-Americanism. Seventy-seven percent said they would be interested in such a session and most felt it should be delivered one month into their study abroad experience. With this in mind, a workshop on anti-Americanism was designed

and delivered in March 2004. The facilitators represented both British and U.S. nationalities and different political views; the intention was to offer students a diversity of opinions as well as to get non-Americans to share their perspectives on anti-Americanism.

The workshop was divided into the following components:

- Welcome, Introductions, Ground Rules: the opening section established guidelines for discussion (i.e., open and free from judgment, a "safe" environment), encouraged participants to keep their defenses down, and reminded the students that each person is sharing their opinion, not facts.
- Your Personal Encounters with anti-Americanism: this was an attempt to get the students to brainstorm at this point with no analysis or rebuttal from others. Keywords were written onto a whiteboard for further examination later.
- What is anti-Americanism? Cause(s)? This component was designed to help students separate fact from perception, be aware of their assumptions, and avoid seeking out self-confirming examples. This part of the workshop was also used to help students face personal responsibility for their own behavior and the responses it might elicit from others; in other words, a negative experience could result from poor behavior on the part of the student and not

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from any anti-Americanism.

■ How can U.S. students constructively respond to anti-Americanism or the perception of it? When to engage, not to engage? Specific ways to communicate? This part of the workshop emphasized the importance of setting, timing, and language. Students were encouraged to consider both process and content as important considerations in any such response or discussion. In the future students will be asked to role model situations and encounters.

■ What can we learn from our own experiences with real/perceived anti-Americanism, both about others and about ourselves? Again, this is the crux of the matter and why we can welcome and embrace anti-Americanism. Student participants were encouraged to be aware of the power of stereotyping and objectifying the other: both as perpetrator and victim. It is indeed a two-way street, and hopefully in their wish to avoid being labeled and stereotyped U.S. students will avoid doing the same to others.

Although the attendance was lower than hoped, those who did attend in March 2004 seemed to benefit from the discussion resulting from the five components above. Comments were lively and they seemed to appreciate hearing differing perspectives from within the group. The facilitators needed to manage differences within the group as the strong feelings attached to these perspectives caused the group to divide into two camps. This shows that the need to educate may have to be balanced with concern for the group dynamic and interpersonal relations within the group. This can be turned into yet another learning opportunity for students as they may well face a mix of fact and feeling when discussing anti-Americanism with locals and other people outside of their immediate group.

Creating Learning from Anti-American Sentiment

Both in institutional practices and student experiences, anti-American sentiment is a force to be reckoned with in study abroad. Sharing key decision points in risk assessment, open discussion with “the other” in a safe environment, consideration of content and process, setting, language, and timing all are important aspects in helping students learn in these less-than-ideal world conditions for study abroad. The question then becomes what can international educators do to maximize the learning?

A useful framework to use when asking this question has been written by Janet M. Bennett (1993). She suggests the key to optimal culture learning is providing the correct balance of content and process so that learners are challenged in their thinking and knowledge acquisition, but still feel supported and safe. In a situation where the content is very challenging a person will acquire knowledge when the process involved is not particularly stressful for the individual. An example might be at predeparture orientations. At this point most students are in a “low-challenge” process, where they feel safe and are able to read and reflect on material concerning their study abroad experience at their leisure.

In a situation where the process is “high challenge” but the content is not, the student will develop their skills. Applying this to onsite program offerings is useful. If educators can ensure a safe environment, with low or medium risk activities, in which students explore the concept of anti-American sentiment they can learn more about different cultural paradigms. Structured opportunities in classrooms, residence halls, extracurricular activities where students can discuss the issue and what are its causes, must be encouraged by faculty and administrators. Inviting people from other countries and cultures to take part in these discussions, while providing “rules for engaging in conversation” can be ideal. For students who have experienced “anti-American” sentiment it will allow reflection on the incident, and perhaps a questioning of whether the incident was indeed real or perceived anti-Americanism. The workshop described above is an example one such positive learning experience.

According to the experiential learning cycle upon which much of study abroad is based, this supports the student’s further conceptualization of the topic and encourages exploration of the environment and culture in which they are living (Kolb 1984, Spenser et al 2002, Stringer et al 2003). In other words, the content is acquired at that point, and they can develop their skills further in nonstructured encounters throughout the program. These encounters are the “high-risk learning” activities in regards to culture learning that can be the most rewarding.

Implementation of Learning Activities

So how do international educators maximize learning activities that deal with anti-American sentiment to achieve the best in challenge and support for students on study abroad programs? There are several points that must be considered. First, institutional practices need to be transparent for students, faculty, and parents, and must model good risk assessment strategies. In this way students will feel comfortable to ask questions, understand the importance of various factors in decision making, and be made aware of perspectives that are more international than national. Second, program providers must address anti-American sentiment at different points in the program—predeparture orientations, written literature, onsite activities, and with individual students when they need to discuss the topic. This will make use of the most “teachable moment” for each student, and the

application of the experiential learning cycle. Third, whenever possible "other voices" on the topic should be included. With exploration of other individual and cultural values educators will reduce cultural stereotypes and bring the discussion to the level of the individual and not the political. Fourth, educators should help students to develop a menu for "coping suggestions" for anti-Americanism overseas that is applicable to their location. Faculty and administrators on site should do the same, and be willing to share these with students, as well as any precautions they are taking in regards to the topic as an individual and representative of the educational institution. And fifth, educators should assist students in culture learning so they better understand different communication styles they will encounter.

Accepting that anti-Americanism does and will continue to affect our U.S. students' experience abroad is the first step to proactively transforming it to a learning experience. International educators must strive to understand this phenomenon and its potential as a learning opportunity. It is only in this way that educators will not be held captive by anti-American sentiment, but can inspire true learning for students studying abroad. With our hard work and their inspiration, and maybe a bit of luck, educators can change the world situation for the better. It demands everyone develop the ability to distinguish between sentiments directed towards us as individuals and those aimed at institutions and governments.

Anti-Americanism is an opportunity not a threat. **IE**

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- Worth the Risk: Four Approaches to Safety in International Learning, by Wayne Myles, Queens' University, and Lynne Mitchell, University of Guelph.
- Risk and Responsibility in Study Abroad: An Examination of Risk Assessment and Legal Responsibility in University and College Study Abroad Programs, by Lynne Hanson and Wayne Myles: www.cbie.ca/publication/index_e.cfm?page=research_e

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