

Engaging First- Generation College Students in Study Abroad

Jessica Francis

Senior Study Abroad Advisor at Wake Forest University

Ali Janicek

Field Director for South Central U.S. at the Institute for Study Abroad at Butler University



Wake Forest University

- Private university, based in Winston-Salem, ~4775 ug.
- 60-65% of undergraduates study abroad for credit before graduation (around 675 this year)
- Approximately 2/3 of students who study abroad do so for a semester or year, 1/3 for a summer term
- Annually accept around 100 first-generation students
- 30 of those students are categorized as Magnolia Scholars, special group of first-generation students



Institute for Study Abroad

- Non-profit program provider founded in 1988
- About 100 programs in 15 countries
- Mostly direct-enroll semester/year
- Recent data on our first-generation students
 - 66 total (30 England/Wales, 14 Australia, 6 Argentina, 4 Costa Rica, 3 Scotland, 3 Ireland, 2 New Zealand, 2 Peru, 2 Chile, 1 Egypt)



Purpose of this Session

- Outline characteristics of first-generation students
- Challenges faced by these students before and during the abroad experience
- Best practices for advising first-generation students and increasing study abroad applications
- Overview of unique financial and pre-professional incentives campuses and program providers are offering



Characteristics of First-Generation Students

- First-generation students - dependent or independent students whose custodial parents/guardians did not graduate from a four-year college or university.
- Up to 40% of all undergraduates, **very** heterogeneous group
- Less likely to participate in study abroad, not in Open Doors
- “Invisible” group – not necessarily low Socioeconomic Status or Ethnic Minority
- More practical and focused on academic career & vocation, non-humanities majors
- Typically reasons for going abroad (independence, new challenges) are not as applicable for these students



Characteristics of First-Generation Students (cont'd)

- Great work ethic
- Go-getters, hustlers!
- Resourceful
- Independent
- Appreciative
- Already somewhat nimble navigating multiple cultures



Challenges

- Family & Friends
- Financial constraints – less likely to have loans, more likely to have job
- Academic – study abroad has to be “worth it”
- Lack of knowledge of systems

Family Affair

- Different type of *helicopter* parents
- More and different questions
- Engaging and including the family
- Providing additional material beyond typical pre-departure material

Advising

- Personalized time
- Passports
- Engaging with the student outside of the study abroad process
- Presenting comfortable opportunities for questions
- Focus on career preparation



Application Support

- Reviewing material and essays
- Assisting with application fees and deposits
- Continued support while abroad (regarding FAFSA, housing, course enrollment back at home)



Pre-Departure Extras

- Passport Workshops
- Specialized scholarships
- Travel Workshops
- Cooking lessons
- Visa assistance



Financial and Pre-Professional Incentives

- UT Austin
 - Hutchison Scholars
 - Upon acceptance to UT, \$4000 each
 - First Abroad Program
 - 25 awards, \$3000 each
- IFSA-Butler First Generation Scholar Program
 - Up-front costs, up to \$2500
 - Specialized publications & on-site services for students & parents
 - Resume building/reentry workshop
 - Fill-the-GAP matching scholarships
- Wake Forest
 - Magnolia Scholars
 - Specific need-based scholarships, overall \$400,000.00 awarded annually
 - Passport Workshop
 - Pay for all costs associated with obtaining a passport

Your Allies

- Office of Multicultural Affairs
- Financial Aid and Financial and Accounting Services
- Office of Career and Personal Development
- Develop Advocates throughout campus
- Program Providers



Rewards

- Admissions & recruitment
- Increased retention
- Best supporters on campus for other First Gens to go abroad
- Increased belief in future abroad opportunities
- Add new dimension and depth to on-site group dynamic
- Tendency to get involved more locally (due to limited travel budgets), and often this encourages fellow participants to do the same
- Student growth (example from a first-gen blogger abroad)



Questions or Comments

Jessica Francis, francija@wfu.edu

Ali Janicek, ajanicek@ifsa-butler.org

Michelle Tolan, mtolan@ifsa-butler.org

Margaret McCullers, mccullersm@austin.utexas.edu

