Working with First-Generation Students in Education Abroad

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Background

Why I studied first-generation college students for my dissertation?

“I am the very first one to go to college so college was not an option at the beginning…I came here when I was 16 years old and I did not know any English” (Isabella, before studying abroad).
Traveling was not part of my thinking process growing up in public housing in San Francisco…

[Now,] I want to do everything, have a traditional college experience, and not shorthand myself any longer” (Andromeda, before studying abroad).
Agenda

✦ Background: My Work & My Dissertation
✦ Voices Students and Education Abroad Professional
✦ Discussion
First-generation college students account for approximately a third of the CSU student population (The California State University, 2014).
SF State

SF State sends a diverse representation abroad

✧ Dismantle barriers: funding and academics
✧ Not assuming anyone has certain knowledge
✧ Balancing student independence with guidance
Dissertation Research Questions

- How do education abroad professionals and leaders perceive and respond to the needs and talents of first-generation college students and include them in education abroad programs?

- How do first-generation college students who participate in education perceive the opportunity in higher education?
Background

Juan, abroad: “Trying to pursue the dream so you know when you got to United States you want to pursue that American Dream. And somehow I want to pursue, to get in touch with the French culture.”
Background

Manuel, before: “I want to learn something new…I wanted something better, something that challenged me. Somewhere I could use my full potential.

And so I’m here and then I feel like going abroad is going to challenge me more that’s going to help me achieve my bigger potential.”
Background

★ First-generation students bring many strengths, including being hard-working and academically strong.

★ They want it all and more

★ Value the experience and understand the need to work for it
Our Awareness

John, CSU A: “We have a lot of faith in [first-generation college students’] abilities to succeed in any type of international program including longer term study abroad, because they have had to overcome some challenges potentially in coming to university and that cultural transition as a first generation college students”
Student Voices

✧ Family reservations & Funding
✧ Academics
✧ Role Models
✧ Cross-campus Collaboration
Family Reservations & Funding

Hai, after: “We all share a story of being first-generation students who studied abroad, we paved the way for future students...who would be experiencing the same troubles, right?...they might be fearful—fearful of parents not allowing them, fearful that they would not be financially capable to actually go there and survive.”
Recommendations: Funding

Funding concerns for first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Ishitani, 2016)
Education abroad participation has been shown to:

- strengthen student engagement in their academic development (Tarrant, Rubin, & Stoner, 2014),
- improve degree completion rates (Sutton & Rubin, 2004; Rhodes, Biscarra, Loberg, & Roller, 2012),
- increase job attainment (Norris & Gillespie, 2009), and
- promote of additional higher education degrees (Norris & Gillespie, 2009).
Academics

Sophia, before: [Speaking on education abroad noted that] it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity and you don’t want to regret it. So, you want to just do it, challenge yourself. So, I am learning to, what is the word for it, push myself and go after what I want to do. Because it is my dream, I really, really want to go. I am looking forward to it.
Academics

Isabella, after: They were tough because of the expectations. I even spoke to one of the [international] students that came [to SF State from Spain] two days ago. He’s like “Yeah, school here [SF State] is way easier...” Tough to adjust that [in Spain] 100% was your final grade and I think I maybe could have reached out to my school advising or stuff like that, but I didn’t. So I just had the pressure of study on my own. I passed all my classes, but it was just tough to adjust.
Desire to be role models

Lydia, before: “I see it more as jumping off the cliff into the unknown and hoping that you are going to survive and make it back.

If you can study abroad...then you can conquer the world, you can do anything.

I can see myself coming back and being very proactive with IEEC [SF State’s study abroad club] and probably helping students go through application process.”
Recommendations: Campus Collaboration

Mark, CSU B: “I go and have meetings with students over there in their space. They don’t come to my space. I go to their space.”
Recommendations: Campus Collaboration

John said (another CSU): “We have regular study abroad advising physically in the EOP office and that’s been great success in increasing study abroad participation amongst EOP students of which great proportions are first-generation college students.”

Ann (another CSU) believes that their work with EOP is a potential model for working with other offices on campus.
Discussion

How is your institution currently supporting first-generation college students?

What areas could be improved or increased?

- Funding
- Academics
- Family Reservations
- Community/Role Models
- Cross-campus Collaboration
Questions?

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Thank you!