Quest Cultural Solutions

FACT OR FICTION?

Debunking Myths about Intercultural Learning

One of the goals of education abroad programs is improving students' intercultural competence. But many study abroad courses aren't designed to support that goal. This problem of practice is driven by misconceptions about how students develop intercultural competence on education abroad programs (Laux, 2021).

MYTH: STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS NATURALLY DEVELOP INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE.

Truth: Not necessarily. While students who study abroad *can* develop intercultural competence, it's not guaranteed. In fact, unsupported intercultural learning can actually reduce students' intercultural competence. Students are more likely to develop intercultural competence when faculty use certain course design principles to support intercultural learning.

MYTH: STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS ARE EAGER TO ENGAGE WITH THE HOST CULTURE.

Truth: Sometimes. Some students seek out opportunities to engage with other cultures, but research shows that most students do not. Faculty need to integrate intercultural learning into education abroad courses to ensure that students engage effectively with the host community.

MYTH: THE BEST INTERCULTURAL LEARNING HAPPENS OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM.

Truth: Not necessarily. Students can have amazing cultural experiences outside of the classroom, but they need <u>pedagogical support</u> to make the most of those opportunities. Effective course design ensures that students have the support that they need.
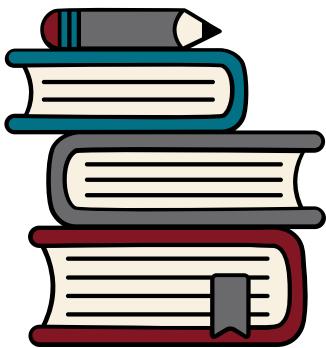
MYTH: DEVELOPING EXPERTISE IN A SPECIFIC DISCIPLINE WILL PREPARE STUDENTS TO ENGAGE ACROSS CULTURES.

Truth: Probably not. Intercultural learning transcends a single academic major. It requires students to integrate knowledge and skills from several disciplines to effectively navigate different cultures. Consequently, expertise in a single area of study may not be enough to help students build intercultural competence. Increasing <u>interdisciplinary</u> course content addresses this issue and improves students' ability to engage with the host culture.

MYTH: SINCE STUDENTS ARE LIVING ABROAD, THERE'S PLENTY OF TIME FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING.

Truth: Not really. Many education abroad programs are short-term, and balancing intercultural learning and academic requirements is challenging. In fact, many faculty are pressured to remove intercultural learning from their courses due to the <u>schedule</u>. As a result, finding time for intercultural learning is easier said than done.

MYTH: SINCE STUDENTS SELF-SELECT INTO EDUCATION ABROAD PROGRAMS, THEY ARE READY FOR THE EXPERIENCE.

Truth: Sometimes. Most students are not prepared to engage across cultures. They lack the confidence and relational skills to make the most of the experience on their own. To address this, faculty need an <u>intercultural learning framework</u> that helps students prepare for, engage in, and apply their learning effectively.
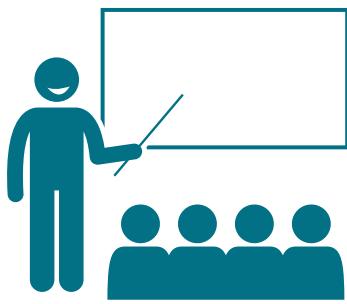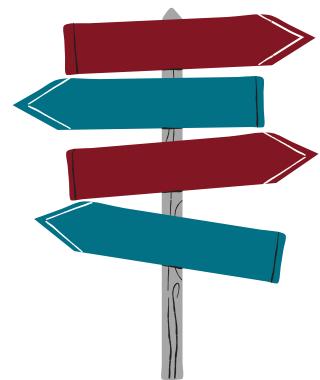
MYTH: TEACHING ON CAMPUS PREPARES FACULTY TO TEACH ABROAD.

Truth: Not necessarily. Teaching abroad is very different than teaching on campus. Faculty need higher levels of flexibility and responsivity to succeed. Designing courses that support intercultural learning is a skill, and building that <u>expertise</u> takes time, effort, and experience.

Using the <u>5 design principles</u>, faculty can overcome these myths and create courses that foster intercultural competence. Visit www.questcultural.com to get started!

REFERENCES

Laux, B. M. (2021). From process to practice: Using narrative inquiry to understand how faculty integrate intercultural learning into undergraduate education abroad courses [Doctoral Dissertation, Northeastern University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

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