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From the Hill to the World: Increasing Diversity Abroad Through Intentional Outreach

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FROM THE HILL TO THE WORLD:
INCREASING DIVERSITY ABROAD THROUGH INTENTIONAL
OUTREACH AT WKU

A Capstone Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts with
Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western
Kentucky University

By

Ar'Meishia S. Burrow

August 2019

CE/T Committee:

Dr. Melinda Grimsley, Chair

Dr. Melissa Stewart, Second Reader

Dr. John Dizgun, Third Reader

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2019

I dedicate this thesis to my baby sister Lailah, who is one of my greatest motivations to be the best that I can be. I hope that I am leading by example in showing her the capabilities of an intelligent and dedicated young woman. I hope I am showing her that her greatness knows no bounds. I also dedicate this thesis to the future female students of color of WKU. May they be inspired by my journey and forge their own paths to success on the Hill.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who assisted and supported me throughout this journey, from applying to study abroad all the way to developing my thesis. It has been a long, challenging journey. Firstly, I would like to thank Dr. Melinda Grimsley and Dr. Melissa Stewart for being my primary adviser and second reader. The two of them jumped in this summer and have given me their time and resources to make my thesis what it has become. I cannot thank my amazing Honors College adviser enough, Siera Bramschreiber, who has been an immense supporter throughout my senior year. I would like to thank Siera for always being patient and understanding as I developed my CE/T from my imagination to this thesis document; I truly appreciate her.

I would also like to thank Cory Dodds, Tiffany Denton, and Katherine Hale; this group of wise WKU faculty advised me throughout my application process and answered my list of endless questions. I want to thank my study abroad professor Dr. Carmen Arranz of Campbellsville University. Dr. Arranz challenged me academically and taught me multicultural competence during my study abroad program in Spain. I will never forget the valuable lessons she has taught me. Lastly, I would like to thank the Honors College for setting the standard of academic excellence that I strive to be and for allowing me to complete a thesis I am passionate about.

ABSTRACT

This summer I had the honor of studying abroad in Spain for four weeks where I studied Spanish language and culture. As an African American female I experienced study abroad both as a scholar and as a minority. Through research and personal experience I have developed a thesis that aims to increase diversity and inclusion abroad, increasing representation of ethnic/minority U.S. students in education abroad. By sharing my journey through outreach I will educate students of color about financial opportunities to study abroad, in addition to resources regarding the minority experience abroad. This outreach series will help minority students better prepare to study abroad financially and emotionally, thus increasing their confidence and likelihood to participate in study abroad programs.

In this thesis I share my experience of being a minority student abroad and the research and materials I developed to help make the experience better for future students of color. I explain the current state of study abroad in the United States as well as the diversity in study abroad, both across the nation and at my institution, Western Kentucky University. This research will guide my outreach series of presentations that will be conducted in September of 2019. I will present to students affiliated with the following three campus organizations: the Office of Scholar Development, Intercultural Student Engagement Center, and Student Support Services. It is my hope that my study abroad outreach series on WKU's campus will contribute to the effort to expand diversity and inclusion in study abroad on the Hill and in the greater Bowling Green community.

VITA

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PRESENTATIONS

Burrow. A. (2019, August). *From the Hill to the World: Increasing Diversity
Abroad Through Intentional Outreach at WKU*. Bowling Green, KY.

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HISTORY AND CONTEXT

To formally introduce myself, my name is Ar'Meishia Burrow. I am a young African American woman from Hendersonville, Tennessee. I have always been a hard-working and dedicated student. For as long as I can remember the importance of education was instilled in me. The necessity to achieve and do well in school was a matter of survival and less about recognition. My mother, who gave birth to me at the age of sixteen, sacrificed her dream of higher education and her career aspirations to take care of her family. Over the years finances have been a constant struggle for my family. Because of my mother's struggles as a single parent, she always encouraged me to strive for better than I had growing up in a low-income household. She taught me that education was the key to success. I knew if I worked hard in school I could provide for myself as an adult without enduring the struggle to survive that my mother had suffered.

Obedient to my mother's wishes, I remained steadfast in my academic endeavors. By the time I had completed high school, I received many awards for my academic success. I continued the tradition of achievement in college at WKU. I will conclude my undergraduate journey this summer as a first-generation college graduate, who has excelled, graduating Summa Cum Laude, from the Mahurin Honors College at WKU. The accolades throughout my academic career are a testament to my ability to persevere despite economical challenges. The challenges of survival in a low-income household did not hinder me, but instead motivated me to excel in my education. I am overjoyed to make my mom and the rest of my family proud through my academic success.

As a passionate student who sought to make the best of each opportunity, I had always desired to study abroad. Due to financial obstacles, I believed that study abroad

was an amazing opportunity I would never be able to obtain. As a Spanish major, I deeply wanted to study Spanish language and culture abroad. I enjoyed attending study abroad fairs on campus and researching programs, imagining what I could experience if study abroad was a feasible possibility for me. It wasn't until the beginning of my senior year in the Fall of 2018, that I decided to persevere and make my goal of studying abroad a reality despite the obstacles. This was uncharted territory for those around me. Most of my family and friends back home had never attended college, nor had left the country. This lack of resources around me presented a cultural barrier to study abroad. To my family, my decision to leave the country was unprecedented. I had no one at home who had experienced study abroad themselves to validate my decision. There was also fear about the unknown minority experience abroad that made me unsure of studying abroad. As an underrepresented student in higher education, I knew overcoming the financial and cultural obstacles would be an uphill battle to study abroad.

Despite the challenges, I persisted in my goal to study abroad. I was fortunate in having the aid of campus resources, faculty, and staff to help me through the long process of my application journey. My application journey consisted of a lot of hard work and communication with campus resources. In regards to selecting my program, I trusted the council of my academic adviser in Spanish, Dr. Melissa Stewart. As the director of the KIIS Spain II summer program, Dr. Stewart offered me an abundance of advice and information about the program. I learned so much from her as my Spanish professor and adviser about the program and its benefits to my study of Spanish; it was an easy choice for me to select the Spain II program. A great part of my application journey and success to study abroad would not have been possible without Mr. Cory Dodds in the Office of 2

Scholar Development. Mr. Dodds met with me early in the fall to discuss scholarship opportunities and offered me support throughout the process of applying for the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program. He shared with me essay writing materials he created himself along with a packet listing other scholarships; he not only gave me this list but highlighted each scholarship and grant that I was personally eligible for, pointing out application materials and deadlines for each opportunity. Prior to my submission of the necessary materials for the Gilman scholarship Mr. Dodds proofread my essays. He also connected me to advisers in the offices of financial aid and study abroad who could further assist me in the application process.

I knew that finances would be my biggest obstacle to study abroad. In light of this I spent countless hours working on essays for different scholarship applications. I also made numerous appointments to meet with various WKU faculty and staff to complete the necessary documents for each scholarship. My hard work paid off, for I was awarded financial aid and all six of the scholarships I applied for. These scholarships included: the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, WKU World Topper Study Abroad Scholarship, WKU Enhancing Diversity in Global Education (EDGE)/ Diversity Abroad Grant, F.C. Grise Study Abroad Scholarship from WKU Modern Languages, WKU Student Government Association (SGA) Study/ Teach Abroad Scholarship, and lastly a Kentucky Institute for International Studies (KIIS) Program Scholarship. I was overjoyed to see the fruit of my labor over each application. With finances taken care of, I finally saw that my dream to study abroad would come to fruition.

While applying I realized that my identity as an African American, first-generation college student enhanced my eligibility for scholarships. In fact, many

scholarship opportunities, like the Gilman and the EDGE Grant, target underrepresented minority students. With seemingly so many opportunities to take advantage of, I began to question why I did not know more students of color who studied abroad. Throughout my application process, I did not have peers who were students of color to look to for advice on my application journey. When I visited the WKU Study Abroad and Global Learning Office (SAGL), I did not see ambassadors of color who could provide peer council on the process. Initially, this lack of representation in study abroad participants was what inspired me to complete an outreach project. I figured that surely if more minority students learned about the feasibility of study abroad and the opportunities that exist for them, we would see more diversity among American students abroad. The need for this outreach project was only affirmed as I conducted more research about diversity abroad and embarked on my study abroad journey to Spain.

After overcoming the financial barrier of studying abroad I began to complete the other necessary pre-departure materials. One large part of this task was reading and signing all documents a part of the resources and forms section of the WKU SAGL site. My excitement grew as I applied for my passport, selected my program courses, and read the important program information. Having never been out of the country before, the SAGL site posed many important questions I had never considered such as health and safety, and special considerations about minorities and women abroad. Prior to reading this information I had not thought about my identity and how it might affect my experiences abroad. However, I was disappointed to find minimal information elaborating on the possible experiences of women and minorities abroad. The SAGL site covers ethnic and religious minorities in only six sentences. Two of them read as follows:

“ In some cases, your outward appearance can also make you stand out. Sometimes the locals’ curiosity, ignorance or misunderstanding of you can be unpleasant.” This word “unpleasant” concerned me, and despite my desire for detailed examples the paragraph concluded with the suggestion to ask my program administrators for further information about minorities in my host country. When I asked Dr. Stewart if I should be concerned she assured me that I should not worry. Despite her consolation, I still felt a sense of uneasiness not knowing what to expect once I arrived in Spain.

When I attended the SAGL Pre-Departure Orientation in the spring, I noticed there were other students of color, African American students specifically, that desired to know more about the possible “unpleasant” experiences abroad. A young black female student proposed a question to the SAGL ambassadors at the end of orientation seeking more information about possible discrimination or racism in Africa in preparation for her summer study abroad program. The ambassadors looked around at one another confused for none of them had any advice to offer the young woman. None of them had traveled to Africa nor identified as an ethnic minority, and therefore could not relate to the young woman’s concern or offer her advice. The ambassadors recommended she speak to her program administrators just as the website does. Witnessing the lack of satisfaction on the young woman’s face I again realized the lack of information available for WKU students of color surrounding this topic. While I do not expect the SAGL office to be experts in race relations of every country, I do anticipate that they are prepared with resources to address student concern. In that moment I wished there were minority study abroad alumni we could be connected to or a list or reading materials or websites WKU could

offer so that myself and the other black young woman in that orientation did not feel so unprepared.

Prior to leaving for my study abroad program I read WKU alumna Tiye Gardner's honors thesis document titled "Racial Hierarchies in Latin America that Affected My Black Experience" in which she also calls attention to the meager campus resources available to prepare students of color for study abroad. This was the second affirmation that encouraged my outreach; I now not only wanted to present financial resources to minority students but also to provide materials concerning their race and experience abroad. It is my hope that by discussing this topic with students and providing them resources, they will feel a sense of relief and preparedness that I did not have when I studied abroad. The next section discusses the research I performed in order to construct preparation materials for students of color that will study abroad in the future.

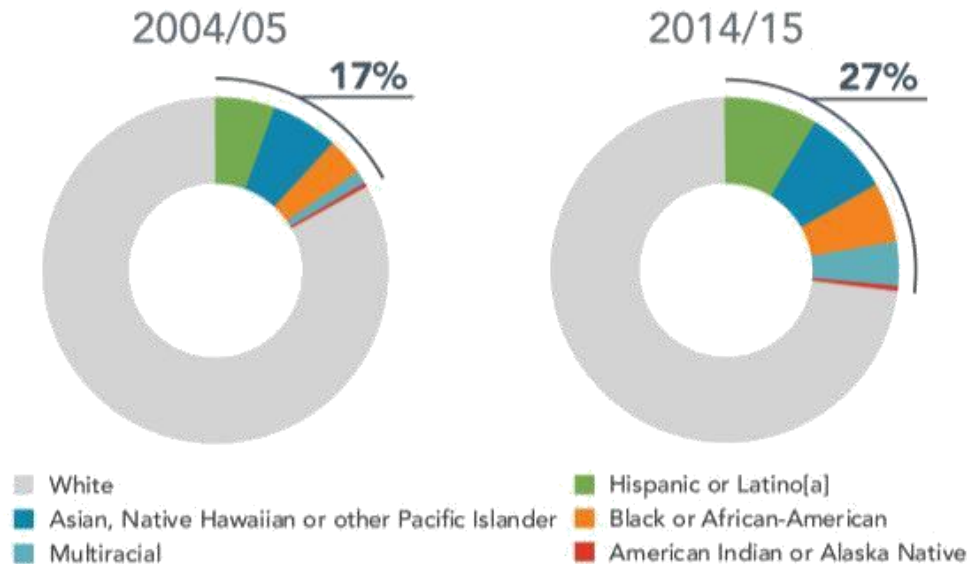
RESEARCH

In order to perform intentional outreach aiming to increase diversity abroad on WKU's campus, one must first understand the state of representation abroad more specifically. To do so I looked to organizations such as the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), and the Institute of International Education (IIE), among others to find statistical information. Once I started my research, I found information regarding national representation abroad, representation abroad at WKU, and initiatives universities have taken to increase diversity abroad. This research helped clarify the purpose of my outreach and provided insight to the national climate of diversity abroad.

In regards to trends in the United States, study abroad as a whole is a growing aspect in higher education. According to NAFSA's official site, "nationally, the number of U.S. students studying abroad for credit during the 2016-2017 academic year grew 2.3 percent for 325,339 students to 332,727 students" (NAFSA, "Trends in U.S. Study Abroad"). This number only represents 1.6 percent of all U.S. students enrolled in institutions of higher education and about 10 percent of U.S. graduates (NAFSA, "Trends in U.S. Study Abroad"). Although U.S. study abroad has consistently increased over the years, the proportion of U.S. minority students abroad has grown at a much slower pace. Below is a graph showing the increase of diversity abroad over the course of 10 years.

Proportion of U.S. Minority Students Studying Abroad Has Increased Modestly Over the Past Ten Years

Race/Ethnicity of U.S. students abroad



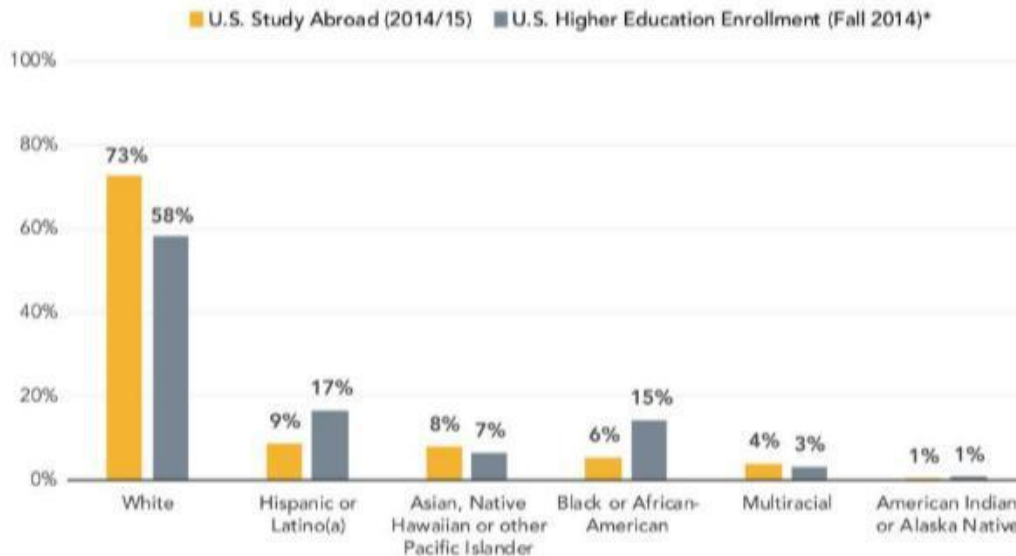
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Figure 1. Graph Showing U.S. Minority Students Study Abroad Increase

Figure 1 depicts the modest increase of U.S. minority students abroad. Over the course of a decade, minority representation abroad increased by 10 percent, all racial/ethnic minorities combined. White U.S. students continue to be the largest population of students who study abroad. Furthermore, according to IIE's 2015 *Open Doors* report on study abroad trends in the U.S., African Americans make up 5.6 percent of all undergraduate students who study abroad (Berger, 2). Hispanic, Asian, and Native American students make up 8.3, 7.7, and 0.5 percent respectively, in comparison to the 70.4 percent of white undergraduate students (Berger, 2). The disproportion of diversity abroad is further demonstrated when the participation of students abroad is compared to 8

their enrollment in institutions of higher education. The next figure shows race/ethnicity abroad in comparison with enrollment in U.S. colleges.

Race/Ethnicity Representation of U.S. Students in Study Abroad and Total College Enrollment



*Data from national Center for Education Statistics, reflecting total number of U.S. students receiving undergraduate degrees in 2014/15

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Figure 2. Table Comparing Race Representation to College Enrollment

The table above shows the comparison between race/ethnicity representation abroad and their enrollment in U.S. colleges during the 2014-2015 academic year. During that academic year, representation of white U.S. students abroad surpassed their college enrollment with 73 percent represented abroad and only 58 percent enrolled. The numbers for all other races are much lower. Those with the greatest disproportion of representation are Hispanic or Latin students and Black or African American students. 9

The trends on WKU’s campus are almost directly proportional with those of national U.S. trends. Pictured below is a graph of WKU study abroad participants by race/ethnicity.

Table 5: Education Abroad Participants by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17	
	SAGL	WKU	SAGL	WKU	SAGL	WKU	SAGL	WKU	SAGL	WKU
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
African-American	2.8%	11.7%	7.9%	11.6%	5.3%	11.1%	5.0%	10.4%	7.5%	10.2%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.5%	1.0%	1.1%	1.1%	0.9%	1.2%	2.6%	1.3%	2.6%	1.5%
Hispanic/Latino	2.6%	2.1%	1.8%	2.4%	3.6%	2.7%	3.8%	3.1%	2.4%	3.0%
Non-reported	1.5%	1.5%	1.1%	1.5%	0.8%	1.3%	1.0%	1.0%	0.6%	0.9%
Two or More Races	2.2%	1.8%	1.6%	2.0%	3.0%	2.3%	2.4%	2.6%	2.1%	2.9%
White, Non-Hispanic	89.3%	81.7%	86.2%	81.0%	86.3%	81.2%	84.7%	81.3%	84.6%	81.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

"Approximate % of Total WKU Enrollment" was calculated by dividing the fall 2016 enrollment for each demographic group by the total fall 2016 University-wide enrollment figure [n=16,323] excluding non-degree seeking and international students. Data used in these calculations was provided by the Office of Institutional Research through Visual Analytics.

Figure 3. Table Showing WKU Education Abroad Participants by Race

The table above shows the percentage of study abroad participants by race and compares the percentage to their enrollment at WKU from the 2012-2013 academic year to the 2016-2017 academic year. WKU trends are similar to national trends with White, Non-Hispanic students being most represented and enrolled each year and the greatest disproportions shown in African American students. Despite its correspondence to national trends, WKU continues to be a leader in education and diversity abroad initiatives. “Each year since the 2006-2007 academic year, WKU has appeared in the national rankings in the IIE Open Doors Report as a top-sending master’s institution for study abroad participation” (“Data & Reports”). With approximately 500 WKU students

studying abroad each year, 10 percent of WKU students graduate with study abroad experience (“Data & Reports”). This 10 percent of WKU students mirrors the average 10 percent of U.S. graduates nationally who study abroad, demonstrating WKU’s commitment to education abroad and its access for all of its students. In 2018, WKU received the “Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion in International Education” award by the Diversity Abroad consortium (“Data & Reports”). This award recognized WKU’s initiatives to increase diversity abroad such as the Enhancing Diversity in Global Education (EDGE) Grant targeted towards students of underrepresented groups (“Data & Reports”).

According to the IIE, there are many obstacles and barriers that prevent underrepresented groups from study abroad such as cost, financial aid restrictions, and lack of awareness (Engel, 7). To address these obstacles, institutions across the nation have taken various initiatives including targeting scholarship programs to Pell Grant recipients, applying federal loans to study abroad, and promoting special faculty-led programs aimed at low-income and first-generation students of color (Engel, 7). However, once institutions are able to increase enrollment of minority students in their study abroad programs, they must also ensure that they are prepared. Obtaining a passport, knowing what to pack, and how to budget are all important parts of pre-departure planning. However, the one area in which institutions fail to prepare their underrepresented students is addressing their concerns about the minority experience abroad. In the next section I will share my minority experience abroad as a young black woman in Spain and explain the importance of minority experience preparation for students of color before they study abroad.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

My four weeks in Spain was an eye-opening experience. I learned so much and grew immensely over such a short period of time. I truly enjoyed being immersed in the Spanish language and culture while living in Segovia with my host family. During the KIIS Spain II program I took two upper-level courses, one literature course, and an advanced oral language course. In addition to learning how to live in a new country, I was also completing challenging academic work, reading difficult Spanish literary works and expanding my Spanish vocabulary and grammatical accuracy. While it was challenging to balance classes and explore Spain, it made me a better scholar. I had the pleasure of studying the language and culture I was living in each day, which made comprehension and multicultural competence easier. I was happy to travel and experience the places I had read about in my Spanish studies at WKU.

One of the best parts of my study abroad program was living with my host family. I had two loving host parents, Soledad and Ernesto, who were very attentive to my needs and taught me many things about Spanish culture by opening up their home. My favorite moments with them each day were meal times and watching the news before dinner. I learned about Spanish gastronomy through the many unfamiliar and delicious foods I ate with them. I also experienced their value of family by sitting at the table and sharing stories over great food. In the kitchen I asked them about their lives in Spain and they learned things about me as well. When we sat down before dinner to watch *Teledario*, I learned about Spain as a country, its politics, its natural disasters, and forms of entertainment. I truly felt a part of my host family, and it was very difficult to say goodbye.

While living in Segovia I visited ten cities, which were the following: Madrid, Toledo, Salamanca, Àvila, Barcelona, Valladolid, Sevilla, Còrdoba, Cuèllar, and Coca. I had many firsts including riding the metro and the fast train from city to city. I gained a new appreciation for travel, having the pleasure of doing so by different means. In my literature course we learned about Spanish authors' emphasis on enjoying the journey more than the destination, which is something I believe I learned to do while there. I took many pictures and videos to capture each moment. I had the honor of seeing and experiencing many things that my family and friends have yet to. My first time abroad was a special one in Spain, and I hope to one day return and bring my loved ones with me so that they may have the same life-changing experiences I had during this program. My time in Spain inspired me to continue traveling the world to learn and celebrate different cultures.

While my experience as a scholar was enriching and positive, my experience as a minority experience was challenging and at times dark. The words that best described my black experience in Spain are isolated and often times lonely. When I attended the orientation for the Spain II program, which was much smaller this year than normal, I quickly noticed that I was only Black student in the room. I thought to myself, "Great, another environment where I am the only Black person, but hey, you should be used to that by now." I have always been the minority and often only Black student in my classes since Kindergarten; that did not change in college either. Despite this I had hope that out of the entire WKU study body, surely one other Black student or student of color would participate in this program. When I walked into that room for orientation that hope quickly faded. However, this was normal in my educational experiences throughout my

entire life, so I did not let it bother me. It wasn't until I talked to my family and boyfriend after orientation that I began to feel uneasy about being the only Black person on my study abroad trip.

As I gathered all my necessities for the program at the beginning of the summer, I had various conversations with loved ones about the program. Each of them begged me to be vigilant and careful while abroad for the sake of safety, just as any loving family and friends would. However, this plea for vigilance and safety carried a fear specific for minorities, for they were concerned about possible discrimination, racism, and mistreatment for the color of my skin. Secondly, they worried because I was a woman. "Please never ever go anywhere alone!" my boyfriend pleaded. Comments like these flooded my mind, and I became more anxious about the trip. While I reassured my loved ones that I would take care of myself I was also worried. I knew there was a possibility of uncomfortable, race-related experiences as described by SAGL, but due to lack of resources I had no specific information on what that could be.

Despite my preoccupations I went to Spain open-minded and excited to experience a new country. I quickly realized within our small group of eleven students, each person was so different, and I wondered how we would build relationships. In addition to being the only Black student participating in the program, I was also the only undergraduate student from WKU. There was one exception, Bill, a nontraditional student; however, he was an adult who brought his wife and children along for the experience. Therefore, I did not have a friendly face from the Hill nor someone who identified as I did to share this minority experience abroad with. I began to feel isolated and alone.

While these feelings of solitude were always in the back of my mind, I did my best not to let them dampen my mood. I went to each group excursion filled with excitement and wonder for my new environment and attended social gatherings in Segovia with the rest of the program students. Towards the end of the week I began to notice how my roommate from another Kentucky institution tried to purposely exclude me from group activities. The first few days with her in our room went well, but suddenly our relationship changed. Naturally, when experiencing new environments together, roommate pairs tend to look out for each other. By the end of the first week, this was no longer the case between my roommate and I. She started attending meal times without me, walking to school without me, and making plans with the rest of the group without me. After class I would overhear them talking about plans to go swimming or to go to Madrid over the weekend and discovering that everyone had been invited but me. The feelings of loneliness in my mind grew, I did not know if I was being singled out because I was the only Black student in the group or if my ethnicity was just a coincidence. At the halfway point of the program I broke down emotionally; I called my loved ones back home and cried about the isolation I felt. Here I was in this beautiful country with so much to see and I felt lonely, having no one to connect to and share these experiences with. When I was with the group for excursions I was quiet and to myself and during free time, I was often alone in our room while my roommate enjoyed Segovia with the rest of the program students. I felt stuck because for my safety I knew I should not roam the streets alone, but I also had no friends to enjoy Spain with. I struggled with these feelings and pitied myself for not having someone in Spain to confide in.

When I talked to Dr. Stewart, my program adviser, about issues with my roommate and feeling separate from the group, she helped me realize that there was one other student in the program that possibly shared the same feelings of isolation. There was one other female student who studied art and was quiet when with the group named Jenny. After taking time to talk about our interests and getting to know each other, Jenny and I quickly became friends who did everything together for the remainder of the program. On the long weekend we traveled to Sevilla and Còrdoba together, which was easily my favorite trip of the entire month. I had finally found someone in the program I could relate to.

Although I found a sense of belonging with my new friend Jenny, the racial isolation of being in Spain never left my mind. It was impossible to travel anywhere and not realize that I was the only African American in the space, whether on the metro or in a restaurant. What made me uncomfortable was the nonverbal communication of people in the city. Many people would stare at me, panning me up and down with their eyes. Some would look in amazement at my box braids hanging down to my waist, which I often styled in up-dos or head wraps. It was evident that I looked different, and I did not blame people for taking a second look. Overtime the fixation on my hair and the stares became a nuisance. It became bothersome to see men point and whisper about me when I walked through the streets or to see a woman stare relentlessly while I studied in a coffee shop.

I always sought to find at least one other person of color in a room or on a bus or train, for the sake of safety, a witness should anything go wrong. However, these people were just as foreign to me as anyone else; they were locals who did not understand how 16

my experiences as a minority in America made me fear the unknown in Spain. By the last week of the program I felt immense loneliness and sadness thinking, “will there ever be a place where I feel like I belong?” In my solitude I realized the importance of preparing students of color for the minority experience abroad as well as providing a space for them to unpack their experiences. If only there were study abroad alumni of color I could contact while abroad, or study abroad ambassadors of color who could share their experiences with me. I longed to not only be heard but understood. This lack of emotional support while abroad motivated me to find resources for future study abroad students of color so they are better equipped for their minority experience abroad.

As a final project in my literature class, we were assigned the task of creating a visual presentation of a literary work we read in the class to show how it connected to our lives. I chose the theatre work, *Extraños en el tren/ Todos Muertos*, written by Jerònimo López Mozo in 2004. The work tells a story of paranoia and fear that takes over passengers on a train, due to the train bombings of the same train in Madrid in 2004. The paranoia of these passengers leads to the false accusation that a Muslim man on the train has a bomb, resulting in his death during the chaos with armed forces. The passengers were so driven by fear that they lost sight of humanity by racially profiling a man and instigating his death. For my presentation I created a collage from magazine cutouts that represented the paranoia and fear that I carry daily as an African American in the current climate of police brutality and other hate crimes. Figure one shows the collage that I created for this project.



Figure 1. Visual Presentation for Literature Class

Figure 1 shows the collage I shared with my class during my visual presentation. In the collage are the words “paranoia” and “miedo” meaning fear along with images such as an expecting mother’s belly labeled “mi hijo” meaning “my son” and a bouquet of roses. I related these images to my concern for the future. Should I birth a son into this world will he have to face racism and discrimination as a young black man in America? How many more bouquets of flowers will we need for funerals of the unjust killings of my race? I shared with the class my greatest fears of being profiled or misunderstood that would lead to my death or the death of my loved ones. I also explained how my minority experience in America made me worry about the unknown minority experience in Spain. For I know the state of racism and discrimination in America, but I knew nothing of what I may 18

experience in Spain, a country across the ocean, away from my loved ones and others who could relate to my experience. This was a very difficult presentation to get through; it was the first time I ever cried in front of a class.

I ended my presentation with the moral of the theatre work, a message of hope, which is to not let paranoia and fear control your life. Despite my lack of knowledge about the minority experience abroad I still traveled to Spain. I shared with the class that life is meant to be lived, regardless of your preoccupations. Despite the unpleasant moments I had a phenomenal time in Spain; I traveled and learned more in four weeks than I ever had before. I am now a part of the 10 percent of U.S. students graduating with international experience thus setting myself apart from others. I developed professional and personal skills in unique environments such as problem-solving, adaptability, conflict resolution, communication. It is my hope that more students of color experience the benefits of studying abroad. While the nature of the minority experience abroad is a serious and valid concern, lack of preparation for it should not deter students of color from studying abroad. Therefore I decided to incorporate resources and information about minorities abroad in my outreach presentations so that students of color feel informed and supported allowing them to confidently embark on their study abroad journey.

MATERIALS

To share all that I have learned through my application journey, my study abroad experience, and the research I have done about diversity abroad, I will conduct a presentation tour on WKU's campus presenting to undergraduate minority students. In addition to the PowerPoint presentation I will give, I will also provide the students with tangible resources they can take home. The materials I have selected for students are printed guides from the WKU Office of Scholar Development (OSD), The Gilman Scholarship Program, and one that I created myself. These documents provide helpful information about scholarship eligibility, competitive essay writing, and considerations and preparations for students of color traveling abroad. The handouts from OSD and the Gilman Scholarship Program are resources that proved useful for me during the application process.

The first handout will be the Gilman Application Guide. This document includes everything students need to know about applying for the scholarship including eligibility requirements, deadlines, and application components. The handout is set up as a checklist so that the student can ensure they are meeting all requirements in each section to apply. It also includes details about the essential components of the application including the transcripts and two essays, a statement of purpose and follow-on project proposal. The handout lists helpful tips for essay writing by proposing questions that help guide the answers to each essay prompt. This handout explicitly explains what the Gilman Scholarship Program is looking for in applications. I believe if a student uses the tips on this handout, allotting ample time to write and revise their essays, they will surely submit a strong application.

The second document, created by OSD, is titled “Five Rules for Writing Competitive Study Abroad Scholarship Essays.” This handout provides students helpful tips for writing a successful scholarship essay and is applicable for all scholarships, including the Gilman. The handout encourages students to be specific when answering essay prompts, to disclose diversity, and to always connect the study abroad program to their goals. The advice given on this handout will help students develop a clear purpose for each essay and will assist them in sharing their stories in an intelligible way. The second half of this handout is a guided brainstorming chart that helps students develop their personal story prior to writing their essays. The chart is divided into four sections: situation, choices, future, and study abroad. By filling out this chart students are able to pick out the most important parts of their story to share in their study abroad essays. With this chart students select the most relevant pieces of information to create a unique essay that directly demonstrates their eligibility for the scholarship and clearly expresses what sets them apart from others.

Lastly I will give the students a small packet of resources I have developed concerning the minority experience abroad. I composed this handout from a compilation of reading materials I encountered during my research on students of color abroad. I created this document in hopes of addressing the concerns of minority students regarding discrimination abroad and to prepare them for those possibilities. The document suggests that students research race relations in their host country before they leave for their program as well as to keep an open mind and to never be ashamed of being themselves. One of the most important tips on this handout is to establish a support group prior to

studying abroad. The support group can be composed of loved ones at home, study abroad alumni, and the student's program adviser among others. I also list online resources for the students such as the Diversity Abroad Community Forums on the Diversity Abroad website, where students from all over the world have shared their stories about their experiences abroad. In addition to this information the document also contains examples of possible unpleasant situations, questions to consider, and steps on how to handle uncomfortable situations in regards to race. Lastly, the handout lists online articles and other resources for more information from platforms such as NAFSA, The Center of Global Education, and Diversity Abroad.

These three documents provide important details for students about scholarship opportunities and special considerations for minority students abroad. I believe the handouts I selected and created address two important parts of the study abroad process in my experience. Finances was one of the biggest obstacles I faced; I took advantage of numerous scholarship opportunities to help realize my study abroad goal. I aim to educate students on the scholarship opportunities available, with emphasis on the Gilman scholarship, being one of the biggest. In addition to helping students feel confident in pursuing scholarship opportunities I want to help alleviate fear of the unknown minority experience abroad, a serious preoccupation I had prior to my studies in Spain. Through the materials I developed, I aim to provide the resources I desired but did not obtain prior to my study abroad program. I hope that students of color find comfort in the advice and steps of preparation I provided in my handout. May they feel supported and empowered to study abroad without fear of discrimination.

CONCLUSION

Studying abroad has been the most fulfilling experience of my life thus far. From the application process to the planning of an outreach project on my alma mater's campus, I have engaged in work I can be proud of. I worked hard to study abroad, overcoming financial obstacles and other challenges. I look back at all I have endured and accomplished and undoubtedly believe that the hard work and perseverance was worthwhile. The best part of studying abroad is that it has been a benefit for not only myself but for others who come after me. I have gained knowledge and a unique experience I can use to educate and inspire others, for that I am truly grateful.

I appreciate Western Kentucky University and its contributions to education and diversity abroad. Despite the modest increase of underrepresented groups abroad, the hope is in the improvement. Institutions all across the United States are aware of the disproportion in regards to representation abroad, and there are numerous organizations whose purpose is to implement initiatives specifically aimed to improve representation. I am glad that WKU is a leading institution in bridging the gap in representation abroad. It is an honor to be able to contribute to WKU's efforts to make study abroad more accessible to minority students. By sharing my experience with students connected to organizations including the Office of Scholar Development (OSD), The Intercultural Student Engagement Center (ISEC), and Student Support Services (SSS), I have the pleasure of giving back to the organizations that nurtured me throughout my undergraduate years at WKU. I hope my research and outreach enhances the work that WKU is doing to promote diversity abroad. If only one student is inspired by my work

and supported in their journey abroad, I have done my job; however, I hope there will be many more.

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