Creating a Safe Space

Transgender individuals may confront a wide range of challenges, some of which may not be apparent to a cisgender individual, or someone who identifies with the gender role that society assigns to their sex.

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Rainbow Scholarship Day Of Giving and New Award Announcement

On December 2nd, the Fund for Education Abroad will be hosting the Second Annual Rainbow Day of Giving event.

Our goal this year is to raise $15,000 so that we can support three students who wish to study abroad each with $5,000 awards. So far, the Rainbow SIG has raised $8,500 so we are well on our way. On Rainbow Giving Day, the first $1,000 raised will be matched by a long-time Rainbow SIG member, Jan Kieling in support of a new scholarship opportunity, the Silver Lining Fund.

This new award will broaden access to funding by allowing one award recipient to remain anonymous. We hope that in addition to fulfilling a need within the community, this new award will be a symbolic gesture of support.

Click HERE to mark your calendars for December 2nd. For more information about the Rainbow Scholarship, click the link below:

Rainbow SIG Reception in Portland, Oregon!

For all those attending the upcoming NAFSA Bi-Regional Conference (Region I & XII) in Portland, Oregon, there will be a Rainbow SIG Reception held on Wed. November 4, 2014. All are welcome to attend!

Location: CC Slaughters Rainbow Lounge, 219 NW Davis St., Portland, Oregon 97209
Time: 8:00 – 10:00PM
Interview with Rainbow SIG Co-Chair
Andrew Coleman  
By: Kyle Rausch – Arizona State University

1. How did you first become involved with Rainbow SIG?

During NAFSA 2010 in Kansas City I attended my first Rainbow SIG Meeting and the following year in Vancouver sought the opportunity to become more involved with the Rainbow SIG. During the Rainbow SIG meeting in Vancouver I was elected to the Newsletter Co-editor position and served in that role for two years. Following my involvement with the newsletter, I supported fundraising for the Rainbow Scholarship as one of the Fundraising Coordinators for 2013/2014.

2. How did you get your start in international education and what are your current responsibilities?

In the summer of 2007 I began working with students planning for study abroad and supported them through advising. For two years I worked to assist them in finding well suited education abroad programs. Now, I am working with CEA Study Abroad in collaboration with universities in the Mid-

Atlantic region in order to identify education abroad programs which meet the needs of their students and develop faculty-led programs when desired. It has been fulfilling to contribute to the student experience abroad and I am particularly interested in serving diverse student populations.

3. Where is one of your favorite places you’ve traveled to and what made it special?

This past June I visited my friend Ahmet at his home in Istanbul. It was fantastic and Ahmet and his family were so welcoming and kind. Aside from learning about and exploring that magical city I was invited to attend a family celebration in the country. The opportunity to participate in an intimate family tradition was unlike anything I had experience before, it was truly a gift.

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One challenge is the stigma and ignorance that continues to surround the Transgender community, including on college campuses. Therefore, in order to generate inclusivity in study abroad for transgender students, it is essential to make the Education Abroad (EA) unit known as a safe and trans-friendly space, where conversations and respect for the Transgender identity are always available to students.

If LGBTQ or even Transgender advocacy trainings exist on campus, staff members should be encouraged to receive that training so that they are conversant in LGBTQ language and student needs.

Putting up posters and signs that convey that the EA unit is a safe space is also a helpful visual confirmation. Conducting targeted outreach to the transgender student community affirms that study abroad opportunities are available to all students.

A transgender student’s decision to share their identity with their study abroad advisor should be appreciated for the level of trust it conveys, and that it is a positive sign that they want to study abroad. When advising transgender students, it is important the advisor ask open-ended questions and to not make assumptions about their personal needs or aspirations.

Specifically, advisors should avoid making assumptions that they know best when it comes to selecting a host-country for their students. Instead, advisors should encourage the students to share where and why they want to study abroad.

If a location makes sense for the student’s personal, academic and professional long-term goals, the next step is to explore how to facilitate the study abroad experience. It is essential that advisors proactively discuss study abroad components that are directly connected to the student’s transgender identity: health & safety; housing options; and international travel requirements such as passports and visas; the socio-political and cultural conditions for transgender individuals in their future host-country.

The encouragement & support a student receives from their advisor is important. It is advisable to consult the home university LGBT Center and the office responsible for Study Safety and Risk Management, as well as the international education community at large. It is advisable to establish and maintain a single contact with the partner who can then be a source of on-site support for the student and advisor.

Depending on the student, they may choose to contact the partner themselves, while other students will defer to the advisor to make at least the first contact. How an advisor approaches the initial conversation can depend on how familiar they are with the partner’s known resources for accommodating transgender students, and whether on-site staff has familiarity with transgender resources in general. Where these resources are not available, it is essential the advisor can work with both the student and on-site partners to assess what support structures and resources can be created.

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then each side can work together to plan ahead in supporting the student. The student, advisor and partner should also ask to how available international health insurance will be used, especially if the student has or is undergoing sex reassignment.

While some international health insurance providers will provide coverage for medications and therapies in support thereof, others will not, requiring the student to seek alternative coverage.

Beyond health, the students should explore the conditions and standards of living of transgender individuals in their prospective host-city and country as well as their host-culture in general.

This can be an enlightening experience for student and advisor, since though many nations may restrict the rights of transgender people, many cultures include gender queer identities and traditions.

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Inform and encourage! That was my mindset in summer 2012 while creating the LGBTQ student resource that is posted under Diversity and Inclusion section of the Davidson College study abroad website. An individual’s sexual orientation is a personal matter and not all students may feel comfortable discussing this aspect of themselves with a study abroad counselor. For this reason, I felt it was important for students to be aware that non-hetero-normative identity and behavior, and the societal attitudes associated with it, varies by community within a host nation or continent.

In order to initiate these conversations with students, I decided that the best approach would be a combination of user friendly on-line resources; alongside helpful information would be the most effective means to address the majority of concerns LGBTQ Davidson students may have.

Prior to developing this webpage, I reached out to LGBTQ students within the Davidson community to listen and learn from them. I asked the students about what specific information they would find helpful in thinking about their sexual orientation in a cross-cultural environment. Secondly, I researched what resources were already available to LGBTQ students to help prepare them for study abroad.

The feedback I received on this initiative and the introduction to the items posted under “additional information” from students, education abroad professionals, and academics specializing in this area were paramount. Their diverse input enhanced my own understanding of potential cultural and legal challenges LGBTQ students may face abroad.

Shortly after I posted the LGBTQ resource on-line, I encouraged students to view it, and to share it with their peers. I asked for their input about information that was unclear or omitted. Google analytics was an important tool utilized during the inception of this resource. The “in–page analytics” function allowed me to know when, from where, and how long individuals remained on this website. I leveraged this information and strategically scheduled outreach sessions to introduce this resource on campus. My aim was to inform and encourage them to view education abroad as an attainable and important part of the undergraduate experience also available to them.
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4. What issues related to LGBTQ peoples’ rights are you most passionate about?

While the rights of LGBTQ people are paramount, I am dedicated to changing perceptions among our community members. Many assumptions are made by the general public of what it means when someone identifies as LGBTQ, but the reality of how each individual identifies is super complex. In my daily life, I look for ways to make others feel comfortable to have a conversation. My hope is that by sharing my experience I can help people with questions better understand and approach individuals in an informed and neutral way. Ultimately, my goal is to make community stronger through understanding and acceptance. This relates to LGBTQ issues and all diversity. I am grateful to have a partner who is also dedicated to supporting this goal as well.

5. How do you think international education can activate change and progress for LGBTQ populations?

International Education is an essential way for populations to better understand one another. As it relates to LGBTQ populations, if students participate in international education opportunities and become accepting of their host culture or of visiting individuals’ cultures, eventually embracing the differences, then they may become more willing to accept those who are different from them within their home communities. Hopefully this translates to acceptance of LGBTQ people but also in acceptance of religious and other cultural norms.

6. What goals do you have for the Rainbow SIG this year?

The momentum behind the Rainbow SIG is so strong and I look forward to seeing the many great things Rainbow SIG members will do this year. It will be great to see Regional NAFSA Conference events and another CIEE Conference event take place around the country and we aim to support more scholarships then even before through the Rainbow Scholarship in collaboration with the Fund for Education Abroad. Let’s shoot for $50,000, why not?! Additionally, Regional Representative participation has been appreciated by many dedicated members and as we come into spring we look forward to building upon the scholarship and celebrating another successful year during the NAFSA Rainbow SIG meeting and event in Boston! 

Mark Lenhart Awarded 2014 Lily Von Klemperer Award

Mark Lenhart, Executive Director of CET Academic Programs, was recently awarded the 2014 Lily von Klemperer Award during the 66th NAFSA Annual Conference in San Diego, California.

This award seeks to recognize people who, like Lilian von Klemperer herself, have "brought other [education abroad professionals] along" in the field and who maintain the highest standards of professional ethics while sharing their skills, knowledge, and expertise with all colleagues. Congrats to Mark on being recognized for all of his hard work and dedication to the field!
When heading into a pre-departure meeting I always take a moment to consider my audience. What state am I in? Will this be their first time on a plane? How can I ensure that in just 2 weeks the group connects with the local culture? For many groups we encourage them to speak to local store owners, connect with students in the area or build ties between alumni of the institution living now in the area. For this particular LGBT group departing Kentucky for Greece, my preparation was taking on a completely different direction.

The group was preparing to depart for the Second Annual LGBT Study Abroad Program to Greece from the University of Kentucky. Our organization had connected with their center the year prior, recognizing the desire of this student group to go overseas. Through our initial discussions they showed concerns around their safety and feared going abroad without each other. It was a true testament to why we feel short-term programs do benefit many students.

Through our connections in Athens we sent a group of 15 students abroad with their LGBT Campus Director to meet with the Human Rights Officer at the US Embassy, met with local gay rights activists, had lunch with a transgendered author, went to National Day against Homophobia with local university students and connected with an organization called Rainbow Families who works with children of same-sex parents and/or families with children identifying as LGBTQIA. It was through the meeting with the Rainbow Families that our group started to transform and get their sense of purpose on the program.

As a gay-dad myself I often struggle to find literature that my son can read, that doesn't showcase a mother in the family. Such literature is, or at least was until this program, non-existent in Greece. After spending two weeks connecting with the LGBT culture of Greece the group returned to Kentucky, feeling fortunate for how far the US and even Kentucky has come in terms of gay rights.

This is something they certainly take for granted everyday. They worked tirelessly fund-raising all year and prior to the Second Annual trip they raised enough money to get a book published in Greek, to benefit not just the Rainbow Families but the entire LGBT community on the other side of the globe.

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As I headed into this second pre-departure session, I had many emotions. This group of students would be participating in a Book Release Party and making such an impact on so many families' lives, how do you even begin to prepare them?

After discussing the normal packing tips and customs guidelines the only additional advice I could offer to them was a personal mantra by Gandhi I love to live by - "We must all be the change we wish to see in the world", and for these students they're living that change, all from a two-week short-term study abroad program to Greece.

Scott Tayloe is twice graduate of Jacksonville University earning a Bachelors Degree in Aviation Management and a Masters Degree in Business Administration. Scott earned his pilots license at the age of 16 and backpacked Europe after high school, both of which formed his love for travel. Over the past 10+ years he has worked with CIStabroad in various capacities, now serving as the Director of Customized Faculty-Led Programs, and has enjoyed seeing more students and groups traveling abroad. Scott is finishing up his term on the NAFSA Region XI Team in Massachusetts and is a Trainer Corps member. Outside work Scott now calls Los Angeles, California home, where he and his husband recently relocated with their 1 year old son, Hayden.
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Like any other students embarking on study abroad, transgender students can so be encouraged to record their personal experiences as a way to process their international experience, whether it directly pertains to their transgender identity or otherwise.

Finally, advisors should remind students of their continuing support while they are abroad. Maintaining open lines of communication will be an essential for support, which hopefully will never have to be used for more than the usual mundane needs of college students studying abroad. Going abroad with such support and commitment from their Education Abroad advisor, a transgender student will have a solid foundation on which to thrive in their study abroad experience.

Conrad Zeutenhorst is an Education Abroad Advisor at the University of Maryland (UMD), advising students on study abroad opportunities in France, Eastern Europe, Russia and Asia. He enjoys advising students on the cultural elements of their study abroad experience. Conrad has a special interest in advising LGBTQ students in study abroad, and is energized by the diverse opportunities present in both his advising region and working at UMD.

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A great addition to the LGBTQ resource was a testimonial submitted by a participant in the Davidson–faculty led program to Shanghai, China. It was posted anonymously within the LGBTQ resource and the student addresses his concerns, how he prepared for his experience and advice for LGBTQ students going to China. Adding testimonials was particularly important because of the relate–ability factor that is especially empowering to traditionally underrepresented groups. This submission inspired another student to submit a testimonial about their experience in Bolivia.

The resource page also aims to assist education abroad professionals who are unfamiliar with the special challenges facing LGBTQ students abroad. I hope study abroad professionals and researchers at different colleges and universities will use and re–format Davidson's resource for their respective LGBTQ population. This is Davidson's way of enhancing the dialogue about accessibility in education abroad and an opportunity to share information.

Ned Khatrichettri is a Study Abroad Counselor at Davidson College. He grew up in northern Virginia, but as an undergraduate student, he studied abroad twice in Japan. Shortly after completing his studies, Ned worked in Japan’s education system through the Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme. After five years in Japan, Ned moved to Australia for graduate school.