Rainbow SIG Newsletter

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Interview With Our New Co Chair

Submitted by: Thomas Lavenir

In his last year of high school, J. Scott Van Der Meid enjoyed his trip to Germany in company of his classmates to the point that when the Rotary Club offered him to go back during the following year he did not hesitate a second.

J. Scott Van Der Meid is Brandeis University's Director of Study Abroad

Scott used the following phrase "The walls were falling down everywhere!" when summarizing his own experiences in Germany. Indeed, the Berlin Wall, and Scott's own walls and concepts regarding homosexuality fell. It was a very liberating experience. "While I always knew that I was gay, I began to view homosexuality in a whole different way!"

His trips to Germany were not the only life changing experiences in his life. When he was a senior in college he won a scholarship to study at Sophia University in Japan. One weekend when attending a fertility festival in Tokyo, with the equivalent of a Rainbow SIG group of friends, he ran into Shinji whosoon became his life-long partner.

Scott's obvious passion for studying abroad, led him to study at Lesley University to obtain a masters in intercultural relations with an emphasis on international exchange. While searching for a topic for his senior thesis Scott came across the Rainbow SIG website. He attended his first Rainbow SIG meeting at the national NAFSA conference in Washington DC. He has since attended every Rainbow SIG meeting and has served on the advisory board. Scott accepted the co-chair position at this past conference in Seattle.

Scott is a people person. "I love to bring people together." It is therefore not surprising that one of his goals is to help facilitate more programming and resources in order to make the information available to everyone. He also wants to work at increasing the responsibility of the advisory board members and to urge as many Rainbow SIG Members to present sessions and workshops at NAFSA conferences.

Advising Students on GLBT Issues Through Spanish Films

Submitted by: Eero Jesurun

With the recent approval of the gay marriage legislation in Spain, there has been an increased interest in Spanish culture and exploring how the gay and lesbian scene is flourishing in this European Union country. The Spanish film industry, with large support from government grants, has been actively promoting Spanish narratives that include a closer look at gender relationships, family structures and social issues that are part of contemporary Spain. After the end of the Franco regime, and the elimination of government censorship in the late 1970´s, several Spanish films deal openly with themes of sexual orientation and sexuality. Outside of Spain, films by Oscar-winning director, Pedro Almodovar, are well-known and often show colourfully rich examples of a Spaniard's view on sexuality. Recently, in addition to Almodovar, several Spanish directors address gay themes in genres such a comedy and drama. How can these recent films assist advisors to prepare students

Advising Students on GLBT Issues Through Spanish Films

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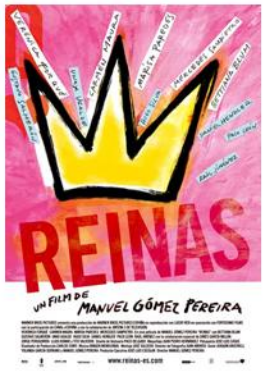
for their study abroad experience in Spain?

The latest Almodovar film distributed in theaters *La mala educación* or "Bad Education" (2004) deals with his universal theme of obsession. As is common in his movies, Almodovar employs characters with different sexualities and gender expression. In "Bad Education" he focusses on (almost) exclusively male character who revolve around a semi- mysterious tale of different (sexual) identities and stories. If anything, this is a classic Spanish plot where the narrative evolves around a tragic event or incident, a common trend in Spanish literature, too.



One film that students with a GLBT interest and Spain have enjoyed watching is by Catalan director Ventura Pons, entitled *Manjar de amor* or "Food for Love" (2002). This drama is based on the novel "The Page Turner" by American author, David Leavitt. The film is in English and starts off with an 18-year old American piano student who travels to Barcelona with his mother. On this trip, the student has to deal with a coming out process when he encounters his idol, an older American piano virtuoso who is gay and on a recital tour in Spain. With the back drops of Barcelona and New York City, the viewer is engaged in a story of exploration and discovery. Viewers often identify with the mother-son relationship and the cultural ignorance of the former. The mother is portrayed as the naive American who is clueless about Spanish society. The young piano student is also uncertain of his college career and if he will become a successful piano artist.

As an excercise with study abroad students, it may be helpful to have them think about their semester goals in relationship to "Food for Love".

- Do they want to be like the mother, or like the son, or do they have other goals for their time abroad?
- Do you want to be "out" about your sexual orientation while overseas?
- How does the mother spend her time in Barcelona?
- How does the piano student spend his time in Barcelona?
- How important is the parent-child relationship while a student is in college or overseas? How does this impact the student´s experience overseas?

Similary, study abroad students have also responded well to Inés París and Daniela Fejerman´s film *A mi madre le gusta las mujeres* or "My mother likes women" (2001). This women directors team is heralded for their script writing of various successful Spanish television series throughout the 1990´s. It is not surprising that this film has an affable storyline that is often compared to an episode of "Sex and the city" except that the main characters are three sisters who are trying to deal with the new love interest of their older mother, a woman immigrant from the Czech republic. In this story, piano playing also has a central theme as the recently out lesbian mother is also a musical virtuoso while her character also reveals another side of Spanish upperclass and its contemporary urban society.

In this film, it is interesting for students to explore how immigration, sexual identity, and motherhood are discussed in a Spanish context. Past study abroad students have compared this story with their own experiences in the US related to cultural ideas of family, immigration, motherhood and same-sex relationships. Two items that are already outdated in the film is that the Czech republic is now part of the EU and the current currency in Spain is the euro. In addition, the absence of a working class point-of-view and Church perspective is curious, if not revealing of changes in Spain.

One of the bigger commercial hits this year was the comedy by director

Manuel Gomez Pereira, *Reinas* or "Queens" (2005). Despite its catchy title, this may be a less entertaining film for study abroad students as Spanish humor can be very distinct from that portrayed in Hollywood comedies. This domestic-geared film is based on the Spanish marriage law that was being discussed in Congress at the time of its making and distribution in film theatres. Many of the jokes, coloquial language use and guffaws are related to four mothers whose gay sons are getting ready for marriage in the new Spain. The suspense is based on who is actually going to get married and to whom? The portrayal of family structures are varied (for example a gardner falling in love with a rich actress) and addresses social interaction between various classes, generations, and nationalities in contemporary Spain, including characters who are immigrants from Argentina and Cuba.

Other Spanish produced films with gay related themes that have been released recently are:

- *Cachorro* or "Bear Cub" (2004). Director: Miguel Albaladejo. This film addresses the gay male scene of "bear culture" in the Madrid neighborhood of Chueca, gay adoptation and the AIDS epidemic.
- *Los novios búlgaros* or "Bulgarian Boyfriends" (2004). Director: Eloy de la Iglesia. This drama asserts the difficulty of Eastern european immigration in Spain, male prostitution in Madrid and some of the anxieties of middle aged gay Spanish men.
- *Los soldados de Salamina* or "Soldiers of Salamina" (2004). Director: David Trueba. This historical and ambitious drama assesses the influence of the Spanish civil war on today´s society and generation of Spaniards. The main character is a woman with an unclear sexual identity who investigates an incident that happened during the civil war. As she (obsessively) conducts research and avoids romantic encounters, the main character interacts and develops a deep friendship with a lesbian woman that leads to questions about her own sexuality.

Re-Entry and Psychological Wellness for LGBT College Students: Tips and Strategies

In 2005-2006, it is estimated that more than 4,500 students in the University of California system are expected to study abroad at one of 150 institutions in 35 countries (UCEAP, 2005). For many of us working for the University of California and beyond, working with these students before and after their stay in a foreign country can provide a unique set of challenges. Helping students learn to integrate their improved language skills and new outlook on American life and culture can often be one of the more rewarding parts of work in student affairs. However, what do we do when part of a student's re-entry process includes addressing their newly formed or changed LGBT identity?

For students who have identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, a study abroad experience may be a time where they experiment with another sexual orientation.

For many students, studying abroad can be a time of intense self-exploration and discovery. Such freedom is often a time when students will begin to analyze their sexual orientation in its many forms (e.g. emotional attractions, sexual behaviors, sexual orientation identities), and will often come to terms with their gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity. They may come to know this orientation during their time abroad and share it with others who they feel close to such as homestay families. For students who have identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, a study abroad experience may be a time where they experiment with another sexual orientation (e.g., a bisexual student realizes his attractions are only to women and decides he is heterosexual, yet is afraid to return home due to the scrutiny of his LGBT college classmates). For students exploring their gender identity, studying abroad may allow them experiences with which to explore gender through cross-dressing, accessing transgender or intersex communities, or changing their name and/or pronouns. Students who have recently come out as LGBT may return to the U.S. feeling a sense of sadness or are anxious about returning to a place where no one knows of their new identity. In my experience, providing a safe space for students to disclose their experience and providing a normal and validating experience for students is an important part of their re-entry process. For some students, particularly gay and bisexual male students, education about safer sex practices is vital in a time of their exploration where they may be exploring their attractions and unsure about life-threatening sexually-transmitted infections (STIs).

For other LGBT students who may have been out before they left to study in a foreign country, studying abroad may bring a variety of emotions. Some students are not out to their family and friends in the U.S., and therefore studying abroad can be a corrective experience if they are among a supportive homestay family or living situation. Some LGBT students are forced to conceal their LGBT identity to their homestay families and may return to the U.S. feeling ashamed, isolated, or even traumatized due to homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic discrimination. If students have had negative homestay experiences, I will often times help to empower them to write their study abroad program and report their experiences. I often receive referrals from international centers about students who have been assaulted while abroad. It is important that these students receive appropriate care, recognize that the assault was in no way their fault, and help them to seek connection and support back in the U.S.

The above described just a few of the many experiences for LGBT students abroad. Regardless of your LGBT students' re-entry issues, making sure you have adequate consultation and referral resources for your students both on and off campus is important for the well-being of the student and for your own well-being. Such resources can help to ensure a strong psychological wellness for your LGBT students as they return home from their awesome experiences.

Theo Burnes is a pre-doctoral intern at the University of California, San Diego's Psychological & Counseling Services center where he is completing his Ph.D. He can be reached for consultation at tburnes@ucsd.edu.

References: University of California Education Abroad Program [UCEAP]. (2005). *UCEAP Overview*. Retrieved October 23, 2005, from: http://eap.ucop.edu/abouteap/.

Tips for working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students in Your Study Abroad Office or International Center

1. Make your office visibly affirmative of LGBT orientations. Have a magnet, have a poster, have a sticker on your bulletin board, have something that is publicly visible. Help students know you offer a safe environment.
2. Never assume the sexual orientation or gender identity of a student, even if societal stereotypes may make it "obvious." In initial re-entry meetings with students that mention relationship issues, I may mention "How does your boyfriend or girlfriend feel about you being back in the U.S.?"
3. If a student has been the victim of an LGBT-related hate crime or assault, it is important to remind the student continuously that the crime is not the student's fault. This may seem obvious to you – but it is always helpful for the student to hear.
4. Don't assume all LGBT students are the same and have had similar experiences, even if they are on the same program in the same country. Bisexual students often report more discrimination in specific countries than their gay and lesbian peers. Further, transgender students have specific experiences concerning their gender that differentiate them from the needs of LGBT students around sexual orientation.
5. Create a book and/or list of resources in your office for LGBT students. Include on-campus LGBT centers, multi-cultural centers, and other centers that address issues of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This resource may come in handy for students who may be afraid to visit an on-campus LGBT center to find these resources for fear of outing themselves but will feel safe accessing these resources from your office. Further, include resources in your community, such as support groups, health clinics, bars, bookstores, coffee shops, etc., that will be safe for LGBT students. This guide will be of good use for you and your students.

Submitted by: Theo Burnes

NAFSA: Rainbow SIG Co-Editors

Eero Jesurun
Resident Director
CIEE Study Center
Calle Carretas, 33, 2° dcha. K
28012 Madrid - SPAIN
Tel: (34) 91-523-9875
E-mail: Ejesurun@ciee.org

Thomas Lavenir
Assistant Director
International Student & Scholar Services
James Madison University
800 S. Main St. - MSC 8003
Harrisonburg, VA 22807 - USA
Tel: (540)568-7314
E-mail: lavenitp@jmu.edu

RAINBOW SIG Bits of Information

Call for news items:
If you have comments, NAFSA conference updates, student articles, photos, etc., please send them to either Rainbow SIG Newsletter Editors. We would like to include both perspectives from international students who are in the US as well as study abroad program participants.

Did you know that our webpage features a list of books that have been recommended by members of the Rainbow SIG which identify sources of information on cultural, lifestyle and legal information...? Well... don't waste any more time and check it out!

Rainbow Listserv

Do you want to subscribe yourself to the Rainbow SIG e-mail listserv?
(1) Send an e-mail to listserv@listserv.indiana.edu
(2) In the text area include the following:

- "SUBSCRIBE RAINBOW Joe H. Smith".
- Alternatively, if you want to subscribe anonymously, send the command: "SUBSCRIBE RAINBOW Anonymous".

To send an e-mail to all of the subscribed members, use the following e-mail address: rainbow@listserv.indiana.edu

http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/

Who are your friendly Rainbow SIG Officers?

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In Development: New Rainbow SIG Scholarships - Submitted by: Mark Lenhart

We are thrilled to report that Bo Keppel has offered to provide a generous donation in order to create a study abroad scholarship fund for GLBT and minority students. Bo has explained that she would like to honor the memory of her partner, Dave Burkhart, while giving needy GLBT/minority students access to additional study abroad funding. She hopes we will be able to add to this fund through additional fundraising.

We are very grateful to Bo for taking this first step! We must now work with NAFSA officials to make sure that their regulations allow us to create this fund and to seek additional support for this and other projects. I have made initial inquiries and I am now waiting to hear back from NAFSA. Once we have a green light, we will discuss next steps with the SIG's leadership. Among other things, we will need to form a committee to develop award criteria and then assess application candidates on an annual basis.

If members have suggestions for proceeding-- or of you already know you'd like to contribute to this fund!-- please feel free to contact Mark Lenhart at 202-349-7347 or mlenhart@academic-travel.com. I look forward to reporting more news about this and other development projects well before we meet again in Montreal.