

Multiple Truths and Many Roads: Leading Graduate Study Abroad

Marie L. Radford^a, Lilia Pavlovsky^b, Lisa O'Connor^c, Matthew Saxton^d

^aRutgers, the State University of New Jersey, United States

^bRutgers, the State University of New Jersey, United States

^cUniversity of North Carolina Greensboro, United States

^dThe Information School of the University of Washington, United States

mradford@rutgers.edu, lilia.pavlovsky@rutgers.edu, lgoconno@uncg.edu, msaxton@uw.edu

ABSTRACT

This panel will feature presentations from faculty from three universities with programs that offer study abroad opportunities for master's-level Library and Information Science (LIS) students. This panel is designed to open a larger discussion pertaining to study abroad and will focus on the following objectives:

- To provide examples of creative study abroad initiatives.
- To generate discussion on the value of international experiences.
- To discuss the importance of cultivating an experience that fosters understanding of the “other” culture(s) through engagement and learning.
- To provide examples of in-person extended experience for students who may be in online programs.

Marie L. Radford and **Lilia Pavlovsky** will describe study abroad opportunities at Rutgers. Radford leads a Master of Information (MI) hybrid course “British Collections and Archives.” This is a three-credit summer session course with nine days at Wroxton College in England in addition to online modules. It includes visits to libraries and archives in London and surrounding areas, such as the British Library, The National Archives, the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, the Library and Archives of the Shakespeare Center at Stratford-upon-Avon, and Bletchley Park. The course involves lectures by noted British scholars and librarians on trends in academic and public libraries, digital preservation, and archival studies. Students learn about how libraries and archives function with different systems of government, different funding models, and different credentialing practices. Additionally, Rutgers offers study abroad for an International Children’s Literature course, that includes a visit to the annual Bologna Children’s Book Fair, in Italy. This event attracts global book publishers and member organizations of

"ibby" the International Board on Books for Young People. Graduate students have the unique opportunity to explore ways of creating text, art, and design for children and teenagers while meeting experts on youth literacy from many nations. Also, we will share plans to offer international experiences to graduate students that include professional conferences and other opportunities for open discourse to discover many truths beyond the boundaries of their local professional and scholarly communities. These experiences will be designed to offer travel to environments in which students have the opportunity to engage in dialogue that is not only inclusive of perspectives of international LIS scholars, practitioners, and students, but which also enables an exchange of cross-cultural ideas to promote mutual understandings.

Lisa O'Connor will discuss the origins of her study abroad course to Northern Ireland and Ireland, which she first developed at the University of Kentucky. Frustrated with her predominately white, middle-class students' intractable view of their culture as innocuous, she hoped that a study abroad experience would help students gain the distance and objectivity they needed to see patterns of domination and repression in another culture and, as a result, better see these patterns in their own. Her course examines whose culture is preserved and whose is not, and who controls the dissemination of information (and thus the narrative) surrounding cultural conflict. Students examine the narrative on "The Troubles" as it was promulgated by mainstream, pro-British American media prior to their in-country experience. Students are able to contrast (1) the treatment of indigenous Irish culture with colonized British culture, and (2) messages disseminated about Irish resistance with those of the colonizer, in order to understand the roles information and information policy play in reproducing cultural hegemony. Data gathered from students indicate that the study abroad experience does in fact increase cultural humility and provide a transformative experience that helps them see "truth" as conditional rather than absolute and to ask, "who controls the narrative" in cultural conflict.

Matthew Saxton will describe the International Exploration Seminar program and how MLIS graduate students have engaged in study abroad for over 10 years in multiple countries (Netherlands, South Korea, New Zealand, Ghana, Denmark, United Kingdom, Austria, Ethiopia, and Portugal). Themes of seminars have included urban informatics, cross-cultural adoption of information technology, polarization and inclusion in different societies, information literacy, and children's literature and "own voices" in publishing. The presentation will focus in depth on the South Korea seminar as a case study that has run for 12 years and engaged over 180 US students and an equal number of Korean students. Students examine the interaction of culture, adoption of information technology, and use of social media, and consider such questions as: Do US and Korean students use social media in similar or different ways? How do they communicate, share, and validate information? We examine the cultural, economic, social, and political factors that shape the online information environment of both societies.

Presenters will engage the audience in lively discussion and exchange of ideas. Topics for discussion will center on the purpose and value of international experiences in graduate study, planning and investment on part of the institution, incentives for student recruitment, preparation of faculty, and building effective international partnerships, including the following questions:

What is the overall value of study abroad programs?

What study abroad opportunities do audience member's programs offer to master's level LIS students?

What obstacles exist to study abroad?

What study abroad experiences would the audience like to offer to their students?

How can LIS programs collaborate on future study abroad initiatives to benefit our students?

One expected outcome is to create an online mechanism (e.g., website) for sharing information about LIS study abroad programs that allows students from a variety of programs to learn about and increase participation.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Pedagogy; Education programs/schools; Curriculum; Critical Librarianship.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

International Librarianship; International Travel; Study Abroad; Comparative Librarianship

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