Mission Critical: Enhancing Students’ Critical Thinking Skills through Study Abroad

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Critical Thinking – NIFA basis

- Abilities to evaluate information
- Appraise others’ ideas and views
- Solve problems, and
- Communicate ideas effectively
Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE – AAC&U

Five value descriptors:
- Knowledge – cultural self-awareness
- Knowledge – knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks
- Skills – empathy
- Attitudes – curiosity
- Attitudes – openness

Four assessment levels:
- Developing, sufficient, proficient, exemplary
Cultural Awareness
Developing Curiosity
Methodology

- Case study approach
- Content analysis
  - Students’ pre- and post-travel reflections on intercultural knowledge and competencies
- Two cohorts ($N = 30$)
- TAMU and PVAMU students
- Facilitated reflection sessions (every 2-3 days) deepen critical thinking processes
  - Learners develop skills to measure value/beliefs in relation to self and others’ perspectives (Kuh, 2008)
Pre-travel Reflections

- Accept information at face value
- Analyze data and evidence
- Make informed decisions or judgments
Post-travel Reflections

- Account for others’ cultural thoughts and belief systems, while gathering info/evidence
- Consider cross-cultural effects in data
- Achieve deep reflection from analysis of events
- Develop willingness to conduct more research; seek fuller understanding
- Relate self into a more holistic worldview
Knowing More Science
Facilitated Reflection Session

- Use facilitated reflection sessions in study abroad programs
  - Instructors choose or pre-approve topics (e.g., property ownership vs. restroom conditions)
  - Students gather information before travel; validate with field observations
  - Students facilitate bi-nightly group discussions
  - Actively pose and solve problems, work collaboratively, experience real-world applications of knowledge, and reflect on their learning processes
  - Instructors only listen during group discussions; facilitators must incorporate intercultural aspects into group discussion of technical topics
Reflection Sessions
Question: What’s our purpose in life?