

Study abroad as a tool for internationalization and linguistic justice: A case study on Latine medical humanities and healthcare interpreting students

Mobility programs are an essential vehicle for fomenting global competencies and for internationalizing the curricula of students preparing to serve patients as clinicians or as healthcare interpreters (Wu et al. 2020). This presentation examines a study abroad program designed for Spanish-speaking students of medical humanities and healthcare interpreting at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), a public Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) where 59 percent of students identify as Latine (UTSA 2022b) and 45 percent are first-generation college students (UTSA 2022a). At UTSA, less than 1/2 of 1 percent of undergraduates participate in study abroad programs (Nolan-Ferrell, Catherine, personal communication, July 2, 2023); however, all participants in the study abroad experience examined here (n=11) identify as Latine. Because study abroad for minoritized students is often seen as frivolous or irrelevant, or as the purview of white students (Kentengian and Peace 2019: 87), the positionality of our students was an essential consideration throughout the design and execution of the experience.

In the present case study, personal and social dimensions of instruction, in line with Martínez-Gómez 2020, were leveraged to foment dialog about identity, race, discrimination, health equity, and language access. Furthermore, Latine students' bilingualism in Spanish and English was leveraged, with the primary objective of facilitating unique access to transnational systems. Internationalization of the curriculum was implemented via a comparative approach to (a) public health and preventive medicine, (b) hospital administration, (c) dietary diversity and health, (d) medicine and the arts, and (e) healthcare interpreting and language access. Encouraging Latine students to more effectively position themselves in communities of (medical) practice as Spanish speakers contributed directly to facilitating dialog about language access as an issue of social justice.

With these objectives in mind, students were required to do extensive guided journaling and craft ontological narratives via written reflections and oral presentations. Through exposure to facilities, resources, and expertise at a multi-campus Spanish university, students acquired substantive knowledge in the five aforementioned domains while engaging in conversations around health inequities, access to care, discrimination (personal, cultural, systemic), and location of the self as Spanish speakers. Their reflections on these elements were examined through thematic coding, revealing high levels of self-awareness and self-assurance in the face of discrimination, confidence in their Spanish, and revelations about language access as an issue of social justice. The first iteration of this study abroad experience for Spanish-speaking Latine students promises to shed light on as-yet uninterrogated dimensions of global medical education for primarily heritage speakers of Spanish in Spain.

References

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