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CROSS-CULTURAL NARRATIVES

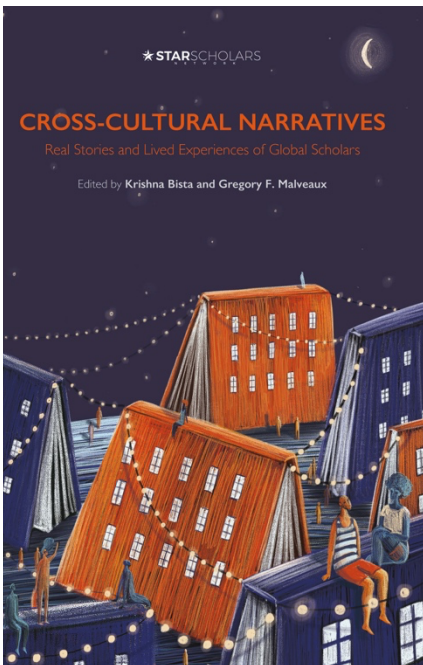
Real Stories and Lived Experiences of Global Scholars

Edited by **Krishna Bista** and **Gregory F. Malveaux**



Cross-Cultural Narratives

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**Cover Design by
*Costanza Lettieri***

On the cover illustration, I represented a sort of a city with book buildings: an allegory of a welcoming "university" through education and exchange - becomes everyone's home. A starry night here conveys a sense of tranquility and appurtenance. I drew deliberately not identifiable figures so everyone can recognize in the little characters. I add characters with different colors; I prefer to use "unreal" colors because I like to talk about "humans" and not to a particular race or gender. I would like everyone to be able to recognize themselves in the small figures.

Send me your thoughts at
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Cross-Cultural Narratives

Real Stories and Lived Experiences of Global Scholars

This book provides an essential forum—giving primary voice to a group not often heard—for international students to share their unique experiences, trials, triumphs, and paths of acculturation in US higher education. In their own words and experiences, they detail how their world touches our American campus communities and academic settings. Filled with pathos, their narratives are steeped in angst and triumph, disappointment and humor, and loss and eventual victory. Selected international student narratives for this book bring a non-western perspective that allows for anyone involved in US higher education to gain increased insights into how we serve our students. This work contains 28 narratives written by international students and scholars from around the world. This book is a unique resource for faculty, students, and administrators interested in learning more about the lived experiences of international students and scholars.

Editors

Krishna Bista, EdD, is a Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Advanced Studies, Leadership and Policy at Morgan State University School of Education and Urban Studies, Maryland. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7893-8275>

Gregory F. Malveaux, PhD, is a Professor in the Department of English and Literature and is the College-wide Coordinator of Study Abroad and International Education at Montgomery College, Maryland. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2456-6581>

Call for Book Proposals

The STAR Scholars Book Series seeks to explore new ideas and best practices related to international student mobility, study abroad, exchange programs, student affairs from the US and around the world, and from a wide range of academic fields, including student affairs, international education, and cultural studies. STAR Scholars publishes some titles in collaboration with Routledge (Taylor & Francis), Springer, Palgrave Macmillan, Open Journals in Education (OJED), Journal of International Students, and other university presses. Scholars interested in contributing a book to our current and future book series are invited to submit a brief proposal directly via this [form](https://www.ojed.org/index.php/gsm/Series). All chapters will go through the standard review process before a decision is made. <https://www.ojed.org/index.php/gsm/Series>

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Dr. Chris R. Glass & Dr. Krishna Bista

For questions and submission, email at Krishna.bista@morgan.edu

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Praise for the Book

Cross-Cultural Narratives: Real Stories and Lived Experiences of Global Scholars offers a collection of timely, eye-opening, motivational, and inspirational essays for everyone who wants to enjoy cross-cultural conversations and either relate to or better understand the experiences of international students and scholars.

Masha Krsmanovic, PhD

Assistant Professor of Higher Education & Student Affairs
The University of Southern Mississippi, USA

Listening to the cross-cultural narratives of international scholars is the most important way to understand the meanings of their intercultural experiences. Stories can capture experiences in the most comprehensive and holistic way.

Wei Liu, PhD

Global Academic Leadership Development Program
University of Alberta International, Canada

Enclosed are beautiful stories of experiences both distinct in their multicultural complexity and common to humanity. They highlight the individual's unique struggles on cross-cultural terrain and the resilience that empowered their resolve. You will inevitably be left with an inspirational sensitivity and connection to people of all backgrounds.

Nancy Thomas, PhD

Assistant Professor, School of Behavioral and Social Sciences
Colorado Christian University, USA

Cross-cultural narratives catch our attention and engage us in an ongoing conversation with more profound understanding and empathy to bridge different cultural divides. The stories allow us to learn from other experiences in shaping, strengthening, or challenging our opinions and values. These stories need to be told and retold.

Tram Anh Bui

Research/Teaching Assistant
Brock University Faculty of Education, Canada

This is a great resource for researchers, university staff, and students to (re)situate themselves in the day-to-day reality of international students at U.S. universities. In our data driven world abounding with

Mei Jiang, PhD

Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Leadership
Texas A&M-Commerce, USA

This important collection amplifies student voices, offering a wide range of rich experiences. I found myself transported back to my time as an international student, reliving how central it was to my own development, and feeling newly inspired.

Elena de Prada Creo, PhD

Vice Dean for International Affairs
Facultad de CC. Empresariales y Turismo, Spain

I found the essays within the volume thought-provoking, and the essays often encouraged me to think beyond students' academic pursuits to consider their entire lived experience within a new country. The writing is often captivating and easy to read. Anyone interested in higher education, international students, and students' well-being will find this volume useful.

Brittany N. Hearne, PhD

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology & Criminology
University of Arkansas, USA

Beautifully crafted reflections that provide a glimpse into the varied lived experiences of international students from around the world. At times painful to read, this book gives unique insight into the trials and triumphs experienced by those who bravely study in a country outside their home. A must-read for anyone who encounters international students!

Heidi Fischer, PhD

Visiting Assistant Professor, Dept of Educational Foundations & Leadership
Old Dominion University, USA

This book, using the narratives of international students and scholars through storytelling, provides a lens through which to have a deep understanding of their triumph in intercultural communication, acculturation, and interaction with local residents as well as their acculturative trials, isolation, stress and struggle in participating in international education and global student mobility. It is a valuable sourcebook for international students, scholars, researchers, and international education managers and providers.

Mingsheng Li, PhD

Associate Professor, School of Communication, Journalism, and Marketing
Massey University, New Zealand

Each narrative in this book is a journey through the challenges, lessons, and memories not only of educational and international experiences, but mostly of life-changing experiences!

Mateus José Alves Pinto

Department of Tourism
Universidade Federal do Paraná, Brazil

The powerful stories in this book reveal the courage and resilience of international students. The stories also demonstrate the importance of crucial connections with the host country and how students experienced support and kindness from individuals who reached out to be there for them.

Susan Drake

Professor, Department of Educational Studies
Brock University, Canada

Cross-cultural Narratives: Real Stories of Global Scholars offers first-person accounts of life journeys by international students. The book takes readers into the complex learnings and discoveries as well as intimate encounters of international students with others and with themselves as they reflect on their cross-border experiences. It is not only a timely material but an inspiring one that amplifies voices of international students across the globe.

Sarah Jane Lipura

University of Auckland/ Ateneo de Manila University

A much needed, in-depth look at the experiences of students engaging in cross-cultural education, this collection of essays highlights the complexity and diversity of students' stories.

Gudrun Nyunt, PhD

*Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling and Higher Education
Northern Illinois University, USA*

This is a wonderful book to read. It includes all the personal stories of cross-cultural experiences. After reading, you would be more aware of international people's struggles, inspired by their efforts, and proud of their triumphs!

Jing Hua

Assistant Professor of Management
Troy University, USA

Professors Bista Krishna and Gregory Malveaux's book includes a beautiful selection of study abroad stories from students and scholars from different parts of the world. This volume highlights the value of living and studying abroad for personal and educational growth. I recommend this book to faculty and administrators interested in learning more about the experience of international students.

María del Mar Gámez García

Assistant Professor of Spanish
Central State University, USA

These narratives are very interesting and enlightening. Understanding the challenges and struggles experienced by international students and scholars, especially when they first arrive in a different country, would help the host professionals and community members support them as they navigate their new situation. This understanding could help the internationals adjust more quickly and with less stress.

Virginia B. Vincenti, PhD

Professor Emeritus, Department of Family & Consumer Sciences
University of Wyoming, USA

Given the emerging threats associated with the rapid rise of nationalism and nativism, higher education stakeholders need to hear the stories of global students and scholars now more than ever before. The narratives in this impressive, timely volume significantly facilitate greater understanding and mutual respect.

Stephen P. Wanger, PhD

Associate Professor, Higher Education Administration
Don & Cathey Humphreys Chair in International Studies
Director, Joint Center for Student Affairs Research and Professional Practice
Oklahoma State University, USA

Cross-Cultural Narratives

Real Stories and Lived Experiences of Global Scholars

Edited by

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Morgan State University, Maryland, USA

Gregory F. Malveaux

Montgomery College, Maryland, USA



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Lanterns Across The Sky: Stories of International Students Across Diverse Global Landscapes

CALL FOR ESSAYS | Deadline: October 30th

Call for Essays

Everyone has a memorable story of studying or working outside the country of birth. What is your story about studying overseas? What are your cross-cultural experiences from exchange programs or study abroad? Are you a current or former international student? Tell your stories of exploring the words, the world, and the wonders.

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International Student Experience (long-term/degree seeking programs/experiences)

Study Abroad /Exchange Program Experience (short-term/program experience)

Faculty/Staff Experience (International faculty, study abroad mentors, Fulbright scholars)

Languages

You can write your story/essay in any of the following eight languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Hindi, Russian, Spanish

Essay Writing Suggestions

Share a story: Focus on moments, encounters, and experiences that shaped your journey as an international student. Tell a story that no one else could tell. Your story can be about friendship, service, freedom, discrimination, injustice, activism, belonging, family, courage, resilience, citizenship, academics, spirituality, parenthood, discovery, inclusion, self-discovery, growth, etc.

Tell your challenges and lessons. Flavor your writing with idioms and figures of speech from your language. Paint the picture. Be concrete about what you have seen in your travels, academic encounters, woes, and wows!

Format Requirements

A story or essay of 1000-1,500 words; Typed in 12-pt size, Times Roman font; double-spaced; 1-inch margins on all sides; includes page numbers. We accept Microsoft Word files only.

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About the Editors

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Foreword

Lanterns Across the Sky

Most of us in international education are still yet to grasp the magnitude of the negative impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. To justify to the administration why an international office needs more financial and structural support than ever during these difficult times, we turn to surveys, reports, statistics, and literature reviews to convince our colleagues why and how international education plays a vital role in fostering a culture of mutual understanding and empathy. Sometimes, in the midst of process, procedures, policies, and regulations, we deviate our focus from why we entered the international education to begin with: for the people, for the cultures, for the languages, for the cross-cultural narratives, and for the hearts. Very much like the lanterns across the sky that carry stories, cultures, and hopes, the book brings us back to the origin of our path—to create pathways for our students so that, through an education abroad experience, people embrace differences and comprehend, at a deeper level, the core of human connections. This book puts the “I” back into each of our story, the heart of education.

Divided into four parts—Intercultural Struggles and Triumphs, Essential Mentorships and Friends, Trials with Stress or Isolation, and Research and Career Paths through Graduate School—, this book reminds us the narratives that are all too familiar to us but we did not bother to put them down on paper; the stories that rise about paper work and regulations; and the stories that we hear all the time in our offices and classrooms. It documents raw emotions from exchange students’ internal struggle (“People Are People” by Nakano; “Finding Human Connections” by Balakerishnan; “I Don’t Belong Here” by Mocanu; “Transnational Study Abroad” by Richter); an honest gaze into power relations between professors and students when cross-cultural expectations complicate the interactions (“Power Hierarchy Between Teacher and Student” by Maurya; “Journey of Finding Myself” by Ren; “A Visit to My Mentor’s Class” by Dhungana); struggles to negotiate one’s cultural and linguistic identities with media-fed images (“Defying Expectation” by Gubbins; Tae Kwon Do in the Spiritual Capital of Morocco” by Anderson); strategies one needs to create a positive experience (“Social Isolation and Loneliness” by Neria-Pina; “Humans, Animals and Plans in Alaska” by Philip; “Back to Cuenca” by Zamora); and the resilience needed to survive and thrive so one can pursue a professional path in the host country (“An International Student Experience” by de Sousa; “It Was Not Just a Stomachache!” by Anand; “The Road Not Taken” by Koo).

With writers from more than a dozen countries, this collection of stories can be utilized in so many ways: as a daily reminder of why we do education, international education for that matter; as a testimony to the beauty and triumph of human spirit, despite of difficult cultural and political encountering; and as a starting point of

discussion with the next generation of young professionals the value of education abroad and how they can be the cultural ambassador for education diplomacy.

This collection is stories of the hearts. Open your heart and soul when you read it. You will come away full of hope and inspirations, rejuvenated with aspirations that brought many of us to international education to begin with.

Jia-Yi Cheng-Levine, PhD

Dean, International Affairs & Global Engagement

College of the Canyons, California, USA

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We wish to convey my deepest appreciation to all colleagues at the STAR Scholars, the Open Journals in Education, a consortium of professional journals, for their assistance and coordination in publishing this book. Without their support and guidance, this book would not have become a reality.

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Jing Hua, *Troy University, USA*
María del Mar Gámez García, *Central State University, USA*
Virginia B. Vincenti, PhD, *University of Wyoming, USA*
Stephen P. Wanger, PhD, *Oklahoma State University, USA*

Finally, we are grateful to the following judges for their contribution to the STAR Global Essay Contests including lead scholars: Rafiu Bello and Schnell Garrett from Morgan State University, Maryland.

Krishna Bista
Gregory Malveaux

Introduction

International students have left a phenomenal impact on US higher education and study abroad. Their presence has dramatically influenced the policies and practices of American colleges and universities, having brought eclectic, ever-evolving learning approaches that come from varied nations.

According to the Institute of International Education, 914,095 international students were enrolled at US colleges and universities in 2021/2022. As a result, US colleges and universities have been the beneficiaries of increased talent, resources, and good old-fashioned humanity. With the presence of international students comes increased globalization in the classroom and curriculum, the fostering of a diverse campus setting, a steady flow of the world's top talent pool, and, economically, the “best bang for the buck” (more net tuition revenue per student than US students).

This book provides an essential forum—giving primary voice to a group not often heard—for international students to share their unique experiences, trials, triumphs, and paths of acculturation in US higher education. In their own words and experiences, they detail how their world touches our American campus communities and academic settings. Filled with pathos, their narratives are steeped in angst and triumph, disappointment and humor, and loss and eventual victory. International students' narratives selected for this book allow for anyone involved in US higher education to gain increased insights into how we serve our students but through the lens of non-westerner.

The book includes 28 narratives written by international students and scholars from around the world. These narratives are organized into four major thematic parts: PART I: Intercultural Struggles and Triumphs; PART II: Essential Mentorships and Friends; PART III: Trials with Stress or Isolation; and PART IV: Research and Career Paths through Graduate School. This book is a unique resource for faculty, students, and administrators interested in learning more about the lived experiences of international students and scholars.

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PART I
Intercultural Struggles and
Triumphs

1

People are People

Rumiko Nakano
Osaka University, Japan

*“I was born and raised at a time when I was taught that Japan was my enemy.
My first contact with the Japanese was you.”*

These were the first two lines of an autograph written by my social studies teacher, Mr. Ed, at a small U.S. public high school in rural Oregon. I was an international exchange student through a nonprofit organization exchange program in the 1980s. In this essay, I would like to share what I learned from my study-abroad experience.

ENCOUNTER WITH MR. ED, A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER IN A RURAL AREA IN THE U.S.

On reading his statement above, I wondered if I reminded him of Pearl Harbour. Did he want me to ask about my view on that attack and the atomic bombs on two cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Having been born on the anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki made me acutely aware of that part of the history. I had somehow sensed at first that this teacher was distant and more formal to me. He did not seem to talk to me as much as he did to other international students. It might have been just because of my lack of English-speaking capability. In any case, he was professional enough to accept me in his class. He made no discriminatory remarks, nor did he act unfairly toward me.

Everything in the 1980s was different from now, and far less advanced, especially in information and communications technology. We had no cell phones, emails, internet, no free online video talks, or even personal computers. International phone calls were so expensive that I called my family only for special occasions.

Nonetheless, such a “low-tech” environment did not bother me so much because I welcomed immersing myself in the English-speaking culture as the best way for me to improve my English communication skills. I somehow feared that speaking in Japanese and/or with Japanese people would jeopardize my path to that goal.

A LITTLE OBSTACLE

I did have times when I felt isolated. Having been raised by a traditional Japanese family who considered reservation a virtue, I had no clue that in this new culture it is all right or even important to talk to people instead of waiting for someone else to initiate contact.

Life in a rural area in Oregon meant some inconvenience to me as well. While I was struck by the vastness of nature in my new setting, I was accustomed to the convenience of the big city life of Tokyo where commodities were within a few minutes of walking, and trains, which ran on schedule to the minute, would deliver me to wherever I needed to go. In Oregon, I had to ask someone for a ride. The closest tiny store to my host family was 6km or about an hour on foot.

THE OBSTACLES MEDIATED BY CONNECTEDNESS NURTURED BY PEOPLE'S KINDNESS, SMILES, ACCEPTANCE, AND SOME OF MY MOTIVATION

Regardless of the “negative elements” of inconvenience, the early aloofness of Mr. Ed, and feelings of isolation and loneliness, which are associated with depression and suicide when severe (Beutel et al., 2017; Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010), I recall my experience in the U.S. as very fruitful. It was probably because I began to feel connected to people, thanks to all the goodwill, kindness, support, and smiles I received as well as the stable daily life provided by my thoughtful host family.

There were teachers who kindly answered my questions when I asked. The school counselor helped me with an explanation regarding the courses I needed to take for graduation, including the course taught by Mr. Ed. She even introduced me to one student who would help me with English. Other friends patiently helped me with my English and general studies as well. Some invited me to their homes to spend weekends together. One friend invited me to various activities, offering me rides countless times. My experience as an international student taught me the importance of having someone to ask for help and to disclose my concerns and needs for sustaining my own well-being. Kindness and helping hands provided me not only with times of fun and refreshment but also the sense of connectedness. Connectedness is a well-being factor (Veenhoven, 2008). The sense of being accepted refers to integration to society, which is considered another well-being factor (Cohen, 2004).

I was also very motivated to fully experience the life in the U.S., which represented democracy and equality to my eyes. Given that I was a senior, I wanted to earn a diploma from my American high school. Participation in club activities and my study objectives kept me busy. I had to spend much time consulting with a dictionary to study all the words unfamiliar to me, which also helped me focus.

A LIFELONG GIFT

As time went by, the teacher somehow became friendly. I remember he said jokes to me, and even complimented my English grammar in class. It was the very first time I admitted the value of Japan's English education policy, which was to focus extremely on grammar, reading and writing then.

Mr. Ed's autograph concluded:

“What you have taught me is that people are people regardless of where they live.”

This message made my eyes teary. I believe his open attitude toward me removed his first seemingly negative impression of me that must have originated in the history of our two countries. He allowed himself to see me as a person, one individual apart from the political hostility in the past. Also, it even created a friendly relationship between us. If Mr. Ed had been “imprisoned” by the past, my experience in Oregon would not have been as fruitful as it was, even with those people who made me feel connected with their support, kindness, and acceptance.

The message “people are people” has been one of my core education principals as an English instructor. English language education usually requires an understanding of “differences” between the students' first language and English, and between the two cultures. It is, however, essential to teach the students that “people are people” who share some common features regardless of the differences. Kindness and care can bring us warmth and healing while we suffer from isolation and loss of loved ones.

The spread of COVID-19 has deprived us of not only human direct interaction but also study-abroad opportunities in person around the world. Some had to leave their host countries, while others permanently had to forego the opportunity. Even those International students who remained in the host countries would have a very limited opportunity to integrate with the local people.

Under such circumstances, I hope more people will offer a helping hand by using all kinds of technological development to connect to one another, especially when direct human interaction is not recommended. Such a small piece of action will help them not to feel isolated but more connected to people. I strongly hope international students and everyone around them will come to believe “people are people.” We can all make a difference with our compassionate, friendly action. A simple smile could be encouragement to serve as grassroots peacekeepers. “To have one good adult whom young adults can trust and confide in contributes to their well-being” (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012; Grossman & Bulle, 2006). Each of us can be such an adult for them.

I regret that I never had a chance to talk about this with Mr. Ed. Instead, I would like to dedicate this message to all the people who were good to me in the US, especially in Oregon and to Mr. Ed in Heaven.

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Culture, Personal Development, and Intercultural Differences

Susan Boajo-Arthur
Goodwin University, USA

My story focuses on culture, personal development, and intercultural differences. In 2007, I went to study for my master's degree in Psychology (Human Development) at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) as a beneficiary of the Norwegian Quota Scholarship Program. I decided to discuss two of my experiences during my time as an international master's student in Norway. Norway was the first country outside of Ghana, (my country of origin), that I sojourned. Irrespective of the orientation sessions, I was unprepared for some aspects of being in Norway. One example of this was my experience with being homesick. Personally, I don't like hot, humid weather even though I am from the tropics. I arrived in Norway in August 2007, and by October (I believe), I had experienced enough of the cold, wet, landscape of the Norwegian Fall. I called the International Student's Office (ISO) and told them I wanted to go back to Ghana. They were quite empathetic and said I could. However, going back meant that I had to pay back the funds from the scholarship. Well, let's say that was enough for me to decide that going to Ghana was not a good idea. Reflecting on this experience in hindsight, I learned that once the honeymoon phase of culture shock wears off, you need individuals who can understand what you are experiencing irrespective of whether they are from your background or not. I felt this was important to mention because most literature on culture shock and acculturation validates the notion that having other African mentors is important. In fact, my published journal articles and book chapters discuss the relevance of having mentors to guide and shape one's life experiences. However, in the absence of the aforementioned, someone who has the empathy to understand your experiences is also a vital resource.

The second aspect of my cultural experience that was most interesting (for me) was the fact that faculty at NTNU were addressed by their first names. Actually, I was quite surprised by this. The leader of my Master's program was over 70 years old and was a full professor. And the head of department was also

near that age bracket. I couldn't understand their insistence on being addressed by their first names. Actually, my Norwegian classmates were used to this and took no issue with this as it is a part of their culture and values. Other European classmates did not necessarily mind. My other African classmates and myself were the ones who found this practice exceptionally difficult. Almost all African societies are patriarchal and hierarchical; status and ranks are often clear and distinct. You certainly did not address individuals higher up on the hierarchy by their first name. Such was my conundrum. In my two years at NTNU, I know that I consciously made an effort to not address my instructors by name because I just couldn't. In emails, I would use their first names as that was the expectation. However, in person, I decided not to address them by their first names as it was such a breach of my own cultural norms. It didn't resolve my discomfort, but it helped me navigate the issue in a way that lessened my anxiety of being on a first name basis with them.

I chose to include the second experience I had in Norway because of my observations in my current position at Goodwin University. My personal preference is for my students to address me formally. Maybe it's my cultural background; maybe it's an expectation I have; who knows? When I was a faculty member at other higher education institutions (HEI's) in the US, students did not address their instructors by their first names. Most students at HEI's use the generic term of "professor" which connotes a recognition of the instructor's role, and not one's academic title/credentials. Therefore, it was also a bit strange to be at my current institution and find students on a first name basis with faculty. I do inform my students of my preference, even if other instructors do not abide by that. I have learned from these experiences that, personally, it is not just semantics. Embedded in these preferences is the notion of respect for the instructor's role; and the work they do, not necessarily an emphasis on cultural norms.

I find these experiences fascinating because outside of academic circles it seems American society in general responds to you differently based on how you present yourself. I actually conducted a social experiment on this and identified that in the same situation and place, I was treated differently when I presented myself with titles from when I presented myself without titles. In other situations, I have heard myself being labeled as a narcissist for choosing to be addressed in this way. The conclusion I have drawn for myself based on my experiences is that personal preferences trump cultural beliefs, especially if you are in a nation/culture that is different from yours.

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Studying Abroad at Chonnam National University during the COVID-19 Pandemic

David J. Richter

Purdue University Northwest, USA

The first time I was able to do a study abroad program was in 2016, which I ended up doing at Purdue University Northwest (PNW) in the USA. Being that I am from Germany, it had been a dream of mine to live in the USA for a while and experience what I had only been able to see from afar in movies, TV shows, and books. My plan was always to go to the USA for one semester and scratch the itch that I had for years at that point. But things turned out differently than what I had originally thought. Instead of satisfying my need, that itch only grew stronger while in the USA, and every day after I returned home to Germany. I started to volunteer at my school's international office, held presentations for fellow students about why they should study abroad, and already planned how I could go abroad again, but this time for longer. The idea was to go back to PNW as a self-funded degree-seeking student and work towards earning a master's degree, working as a teacher assistant (TA) for fee remission and also at the international office to support any costs that would arise. When the time for my bachelor's thesis came in Germany, I unexpectedly got an offer to write it at Michigan State University as an exchange research assistant for one semester with all expenses covered. While I was back in the USA, I finalized all the things that needed to be done to return for my graduate degree at PNW.

During my first stay at PNW in 2016, I was also lucky enough to make friends all over the world, many of which were from east Asia. This led me to be more and more interested in the region and I started learning Korean. Just before my departure to return to PNW for my master's degree in 2019, I was awarded a scholarship for the summer of 2019 to go to Korea for a summer program to take Korean classes at Chonnam National University.

MY DEGREE SEEKING PROGRAM ABROAD IN THE USA

When I started my master's program in the USA in the fall of 2019, I realized a dream I had for years. Ever after doing my first semester abroad in 2016, I knew I wanted to experience life away from my home country for a

longer period of time. A master's degree in the USA was the goal that I set for myself primarily since it would be a multiyear affair and I would be able to finance it all by myself working on campus. Once I got accepted both into the program and also as a teaching assistant at the school, I was excited and ready to experience life in the greater Chicago area for the next two plus years. But then after just one semester of regular classes, COVID-19 struck and many things changed.

All classes moved to online “classrooms” and going out became a risk. This made me move back home to Germany for about six months and I had lost a lot of time and missed out on forming meaningful friendships like I had done before. This made me long for more time abroad, since I was sadly unable to experience life in the U.S. the way I had hoped for in the years prior. Since I had planned to go to Korea over the summer to attend the next Summer School at CNU (which was obviously also impossible), I started looking for the next best thing.

TRANSNATIONAL ONLINE SUMMER SCHOOL AT CHONNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH KOREA

Just before I started my master's degree in the United States in the fall of 2019, I decided to attend the Chonnam National University International Summer School (CNUISS'19) in the summer of that year. I had previously begun to self-study Korean in my free time and wanted to take the next step and be more serious about learning the language. So, I signed up for a four-week intensive language class at Chonnam National University in Gwangju, a city in the Southeast of the country. The classes were great, and I absolutely enjoyed myself, so I knew I had to come back to Korea even before CNUISS'19 was over. Rather than me being able to satisfy the itch, it intensified just like it did before. Due to the pandemic, however, returning to Korea became impossible and the 2020 iteration of the program was scrapped entirely.

As 2021 came about, the staff at CNU decided to transition the ISS from an all-in person program to one that was held all online. This gave me the chance to register again and take the next level Korean language classes as a transnational study abroad student. With this program being held entirely remotely however, I was sceptical if it would be able to replicate the joy I had with it in 2019, or if I would be let down by the study-abroad-from-home experience. I only had very little experience with online study abroad programs and was therefore worried that I might not be able to enjoy the abroad aspect of it, as I would be alone at home throughout the entire program. Classes would be held synchronously for 3 hours at a time, 4 days a week. All my classes would be held late in the evening due to the time difference from PNW in the USA to CNU in Korea, which was another concern that I had prior to the program kicking off, because I really wanted to improve my Korean skills during this month of classes. All the classes being held remotely and late in the evening seemed as if it could become a hindrance for the learning process. Looking at both the academic calendar as

well as the cultural experience program, however, made me hopeful that registering for this program was the right choice. The school had put in an enormous amount of work to not just modify the teaching methods in a way that would allow for remote education, but also set up an entire months' worth of cultural activities that students could experience from their respective homes.

As the start date drew closer and closer, the first emails from the buddy program assignment reached my inbox. I wasn't sure how well this buddy program would work out, as we would never be able to meet in person. When I attended CNUISS'19, my buddy group would regularly meet for lunch, dinner or just to hang out together. In all online CNUISS'20, however, this would not be possible, due to us being in different places, and on top of that, in different time zones too. After we had exchanged contacts, me and my team started to communicate and to get to know each other. With it all happening through text messages, things started off slow at first and would remain that way until the first meeting where we would finally get to see each other through video calls on Zoom. The Buddy Program was one of the two weekly cultural sessions, where we would interact with Korean students from CNU as well as other international participants. The Buddy Program was held every Wednesday and focused on Korean experiences that were set up and provided to us through a care package sent by the school through the mail. The first week we learned about Korean pop culture, the second week we created Korean style stamps using a kit that was sent to us. The third week we made traditional Korean food (which was again sent by post to all students), with the fourth week being the award and farewell ceremony. Saturdays were set up to be Korean Language Exchange sessions, with yet another group of CNU and international participants and was a place where we could all learn from each other, be it to improve in English or Korean.

It was not long into the program that I realized that I had no reason to worry if this program was going to fulfil my expectations. The classes were engaging and interactive, even with all the barriers that COVID forced on us, and I learned more than I could have wished for. Not even the fact that I had to focus until late at night turned out to be a problem. As for the cultural side, which might have been even more challenging to get right, with none of us being able to go to the host country, I felt like they were just as well prepared and executed as the classes were.

I am extremely happy that I decided to take this step and give the online CNUISS'21 a chance. Even though I was able to participate in study abroad again, my itch remains unscratched, and I am now more than ever looking forward to returning to Korea in person, which I would argue is a good thing.

I am honestly surprised but very happy that I managed to academically improve my Korean skills considerably and make really good friends along the way. These are friends that I still talk to on a regular basis, even though the program is over, and we never got to meet in person. Throughout this process I

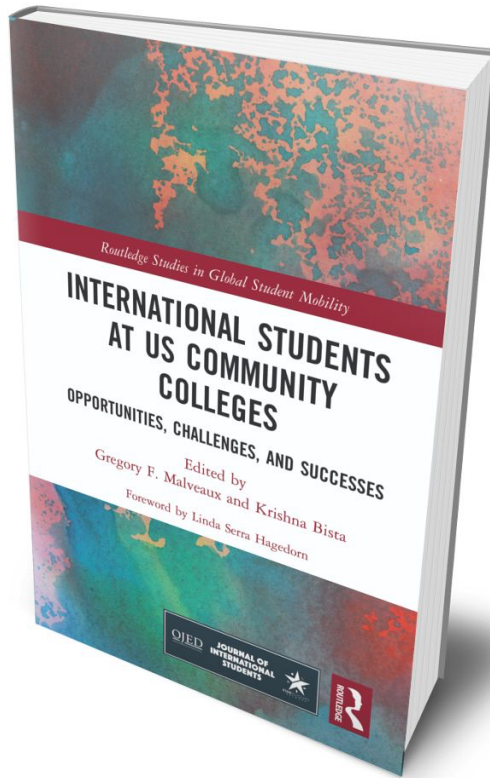
learned that while going to a country to learn the language and experience the culture is something I enjoy more than anything else, but there are also alternative ways of achieving similar results, which are in turn much cheaper, less time consuming, less difficult to plan for, and much easier to integrate into a full course of study, since you do not even need to leave your own apartment to participate in them. I am certain that this was not the last online study abroad program for me and I am excited to participate in them, instead of being sceptical.



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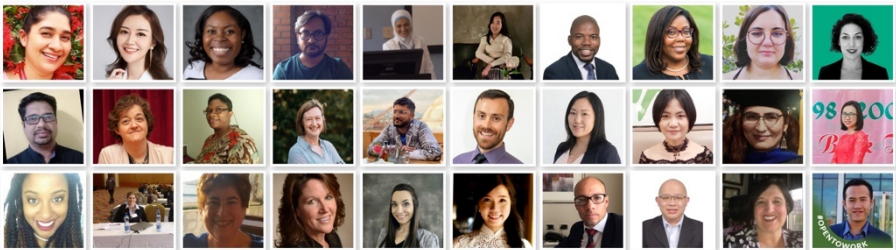
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