UW Tacoma: Meeting the Needs of a Diverse Student Body - Programming & On-Campus Global Learning

UW Tacoma is an urban-serving university providing access to students in a way that transforms families and communities. We impact and inform economic development through community-engaged students and faculty. We conduct research that is of direct use to our community and region. And, most importantly, we seek to be connected to our community's needs and aspirations.

Focus Areas: Pre-departure, Returnee, Advising, Targeted Student Outreach, Developing international opportunities for underrepresented students

Describe your initiative/project

We, the Office of Global Affairs at the University of Washington Tacoma, are developing innovative study abroad programming to meet the needs of our diverse student body. These include:

- Walk-in study abroad advising in our Center for Equity and Inclusion,
- Outreach to students organizations such as our First Gen Fellows, and
- Pre-departure workshops for both faculty and students that focus on social identity abroad.

Because many of our non-traditional students experience real barriers to conventional education abroad programs, we are also creating on-campus global learning opportunities, such as:

- The Global Ambassadors Program (http://www.tacoma.uw.edu/global-affairs/global-ambassadors-program), which brings together domestic and international students to discuss social justice issues through an international lens.
- Our Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL Fellows Program (http://www.tacoma.uw.edu/global-affairs/uw-tacoma-coil-fellows-program)), which supports faculty in the development of global classrooms with a focus on first and second year courses.

What need does this initiative/project intend to meet? What conversations/other projects led to its creation?

The University of Washington Tacoma is an urban-serving university in the Seattle area that educates a truly diverse student body, many of whom are from traditionally underrepresented groups. We are an access-driven university that serves approximately 5,000 students, and offers more than 40 undergraduate majors and 12 graduate programs.

We understand that many of our students are place-bound and are unable to participate in traditional study abroad opportunities and we are working to diversify opportunities for high-impact global education.

The University of Washington's tri-campus Diversity Blueprint Initiative has the goal to create a truly inclusive and equitable environment for learning, research, service, and outreach. The UW Tacoma Office of Global Affairs initiatives aim to cultivate an inclusive campus climate and help to attract, retain, and graduate a diverse and excellent student body.

Our initiatives also align with UW Tacoma's strategic plan: Through our work, we reduce disparities in achievement, experience and opportunity across diverse groups of students and increase opportunities for students to understand and embrace the assets of our diverse communities through local and global learning and engagement experiences.
Finally, the Office of Global Affairs is a newly created unit on this campus. It combined Student Fellowships & Awards, International Student and Scholar Services, and Study Abroad. Our goal is to promote global learning opportunities for our diverse student body, which our office values reflect:

Students First: We celebrate the tremendous assets of our student body, including their already existing intercultural competencies and language skills, and support the development of their global citizenship.

Access: We extend access to global education for all our students, especially for students who have been traditionally underrepresented in international exchanges and study abroad.

Equity & Inclusion: We commit to programming that recognizes and explores the assets and histories of our diverse global communities.

Which student group(s) did your institution target as part of your initiative/project?

Our target group is really any undergraduate student, especially those that have traditionally been underrepresented in education abroad. We want to promote on- and off-campus global learning opportunities to all of our students, whether they are domestic or international.

Why did your institution feel that it was necessary to target this group?

The University of Washington Tacoma is an urban-serving university that educates a truly diverse student body. Last academic year, more than 60% of our first-year students were the first in their families to attend college, and Best College Reviews (https://www.bestcollegereviews.org/features/top-ethnically-diverse-colleges/) named UW Tacoma on their list of the 50 top ethnically diverse colleges in the U.S. Because many of our non-traditional students experience real barriers to conventional education abroad programs, we are creating additional on-campus global learning opportunities.

Tell us step by step the process taken to implement this initiative/project?

The Office of Global Affairs has taken several steps to provide more global learning opportunities to our students:

- We were granted funding through UW Tacoma's Strategic Initiative Fund (SIF) which will help develop:
  - Our Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) program, which fosters global exchange and understanding through online learning environments, specifically focusing on first and second year courses. UW Tacoma faculty receive a $1000 stipend to develop and implement this international pedagogy.
  - Language exchanges between native speakers and language learners. In the pilot year, an international student from Saudi Arabia has been offering Arabic lessons.
  - Global Ambassadors Program: an international and domestic student buddy program in which students work to understand each other's privileges and oppressions, learn skills like tolerance and allyship and take part in campus programs that celebrate difference and diversity.
  - Changing the focus of programming to address our urban-serving mission:
    - Creating opportunities for discussion about social identity when preparing for study abroad, specifically focusing on how a student's social identity will interact with the host country's culture and how perceptions may vary. These discussions take place at Study Abroad 101 sessions, pre-departure orientations, and faculty orientations.
    - Changing the Global Ambassadors program from a purely social program to one that revolves around social justice. Creating social justice themes for each month's cohort meeting and inviting experts to share their knowledge and facilitate conversations with the cohort.
    - Developing relationships with student organizations, like First Gen Fellows, in order to provide tailored study abroad advising.
  - Working more closely with the Center for Equity and Inclusion, including hosting weekly walk-in advising sessions in the Center.

Which obstacles were encountered throughout the planning and implementation phases?

Funding for the Global Ambassadors program is limited. We have used some of our own budget, but some activities, like hiring an outside consultant to lead a diversity-training workshop or hosting an overnight, reflective end-of-the-year retreat for our Global Ambassador participants, had to be cut.

Because UW Tacoma is a commuter campus, students are often less likely to participate in organizations and extracurricular events. For the Global Ambassador Program, we have tried to address this participation challenge with a personalized letter of recommendation. Global Ambassadors who complete the cohort requirements will receive a personalized letter of recommendation written, which will explain all the skills and experiences the student gained through their participation in the program. We remind students that they can use this letter when applying for internships, scholarships, employment, graduate school, etc. We intend to survey students at the end of the academic year to see if the letter of recommendation motivated them to join the program.

Other issues are related to workload. Many of these new projects include quite a bit of extra time to plan and implement our programs. Although there is additional workload we have not been granted additional staff to help with our new initiatives.

Which faculties, departments, centers and/or students groups on campus were involved in the process?

http://www.diversitynetwork.org/?page=GP_UWash_Tacoma
Were there any new assessments and/or procedures produced due to the initiative/project? Describe any new processes, policies, assessments, or other tools that may have been created or updated to reflect the office’s commitment to diversity and inclusion.

While developing these new initiatives, we also reflected on how we can modify current processes and assessments to reflect our commitment to diversity and inclusion. In doing so, we have added diversity and inclusion related questions to follow-up interviews we conduct with students who have received one of our Study Abroad Scholarships. At the quarterly debrief sessions for our scholarship recipients, we ask returnees about how their social identity impacted their experiences abroad.

We've also started offering more re-entry programming for recently returned study abroad alumni. Much of this programming revolves around reflection, and includes reflection based on one's social identity and how it interacted with the host culture.

How would your institution approach this initiative/project differently if you were to start over?

As mentioned above, it would be helpful to have another set of hands to help with all our new initiatives. As such, if we were able to start over, we would change the scope of one of our Global Affairs Fellows (student worker) positions to include implementing new diversity-related initiatives.

What were the results of your initiative?

This initiative is less than a year old and as such there has yet to be a formal assessment of many of the new programs. However, we have many success stories:

- Initially, 35 students signed up for the Global Ambassadors Program. After the initial drop off period, we have 21 students who consistently participate. The students meet for 3 hours a month with their buddy groups, each of which consists of 1-2 international students and 2-3 domestic students. Assessments of the program show that students are pleased with the program content and have learned more about new cultures and social justice topics.
- In the inaugural year, nine faculty members are participating in our COIL Fellows Program. Seven of them teach first and second year students and plan to design COIL classes in introductory writing classes, sociology, social work, and communications classes.
- 3 of the 5 students who work in the Center for Equity and Inclusion have applied to study abroad, and all of them received either UW or national study abroad scholarships. The Center for Equity and Inclusion has begun including Study Abroad related news/events in their weekly newsletter, which has helped us reach more traditionally underrepresented students.
- Data from spring 2017 to winter 2018 quarters shows that 56.5% of the UW Tacoma study abroad participants identify as students of color, compared to the 27.1% national average, reported in the 2016 Open Doors report. This is quite representative of our student body, as about 56% of our student body identify as students of color.

What would you recommend to other institutions interested in implementing a similar initiative?

Collaboration is key! Connect with other departments and offices on campus to see how you can join forces. Don't reinvent the wheel, but just make adjustments. Most of our new initiatives have just been tweaked or amped up to better serve our students. Keep applying for grants/funding!

Organizational Profile:

How many students (undergraduate) are enrolled in your institution?
4,400 (as of spring 2018)

How many undergraduate students from your institution study abroad each year?
100

Institution Type
Public

Quick Links
About Us (/page/AboutUs)  Events (/events/event_list.asp)  Member Resources (/page/resourcecenter)  Join Our Mailing List (/page/newslettersubscribe)

http://www.diversitynetwork.org/?page=GP_UWash_Tacoma