

Expanding Global Learning Experiential Programs for WCU BIPOC Students



End-of-Year Report for the 2024-25 Innovation in Diversity & Inclusion Grant

Hadih Deedat, PhD, MSW, MPH

Summary of the Program

WCU, mirroring the national trend, has less diversity in study abroad programming in Sub-Saharan Africa, with only two (2) or 6% of WCU's faculty-led study abroad programs being directed to Sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the 2023-24 AY. Also, nationally Blacks, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students are traditionally underrepresented in international educational exchange experiences nationally. Pre-COVID study abroad data showed that only 124 out of approximately 4,309 (or 0.03%) of WCU BIPOC students participated in study abroad programs in 2019.

It was in response to the limited diversity in WCU study abroad programming in Sub-Saharan Africa and BIPOC student representation in study abroad options at WCU that I applied for the Innovation in Diversity & Inclusion Grant (IDIG) to support the *Experiential Learning in Ghana: Public Health Social Work* study abroad program with the goal of establishing a sustainable and affordable study abroad program in Ghana (Sub-Saharan Africa) that is open to all WCU students, with a particular focus on BIPOC.

Program Outcomes

The first cohort of the *Experiential Learning in Ghana: Public Health Social Work* program was hugely successful. It was made up of 22 students from seven different majors (social work, public health, nursing, education, communication studies, interdisciplinary studies, and exercise science). The group traveled in January 2025, and with this travel, the program has added to the diversity in education abroad options for WCU students.

The first cohort also had a particularly higher BIPOC student participation rate for a WCU study abroad program. Sixteen of the 22 students (72.7%) who participated in the January 2025 group identified as BIPOC. Also, it is worth pointing out that students on the WCU Philadelphia campus are significantly underrepresented in WCU study abroad programming. I was intentional in my efforts to increase the inclusion of Philadelphia campus students in the program by being accessible and supportive of the students, which translated into six (6) Philadelphia campus students (all BIPOC) participating in the program. This is a significant number of Philadelphia campus students' inclusion in a single WCU education abroad programming.

The program offered students experiential learning exposures by taking them on academically and culturally diverse field trips, including those to the Osu Children's Home (the largest orphanage in Ghana), the Ridge Hospital (one of the biggest public health facilities in the country), and the University of Ghana where they interacted with social work and public health students and professors. The program also took students to Elmina Slave Castle and Dungeons, an infamous castle built by the Portuguese in the 15th century that played a significant role in the transatlantic slave trade. The visit to the Elmina Castle enabled students to have the rare experience of seeing and learning about one of the largest, infamous edifices to have served as a holding post for the inhumane slave trade that impacted and continues to impact African Americans, Africans in the diaspora, and the African continent.

Not only did the Innovation in Diversity & Inclusion Grant help subsidize the overall program cost that helped many BIPOC students to go on the trip, but it also spurred me on to seek additional opportunities to further bring down the program cost, including my pursuit of the 2025 Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students (IDEAS) grant, a U.S. State Department grant.

Narrative Description of Budget Spending

The program adhered to the total \$5,000 grant award, which was used to pay the program cost for two additional faculty travelers, Dr. Brie Radis and Dr. Heather Edelblute. But for the Innovation in Diversity & Inclusion Grant, the program cost for these two faculty travelers would have been passed on to the students who went on the trip.

Visit to the Osu Children's Home



Visit to the Ridge Hospital



Visit to the Elmina Slave Castle and Dungeons



Visit to the University of Ghana



