

# **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?

