

# Ideologies Abroad:

## Encountering Political Doctrines on a Faculty-led Comparative Healthcare Program

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### Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Abroad; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; Internationalization and Global Learning; University/Higher Education

### Setting

This case takes place during a 2-week faculty-led study abroad program in Comparative Healthcare from a university in the United States to Western Europe. The program runs every year to Europe, often varying the countries and sometimes returning to popular selections. The group consisted of 16 undergraduate and graduate students that traveled to Munich, Germany; Interlaken and Geneva, Switzerland; and Paris, France to witness healthcare systems firsthand. Of the 16 students, only four self-identified as minorities. The faculty leader does not identify as a minority.

Students participated in healthcare facility visits, guided tours of healthcare museums, and guest lectures by healthcare professionals to understand differences between healthcare systems in Western Europe and the United States. The program is designed to immerse students in healthcare systems while also experiencing the culture in each community and identifying the connection between local customs and their influence on healthcare. In terms of healthcare systems, Europe partakes in universal healthcare whereas the United States' system uses a mix of government and private insurances to fund care, resulting in a disparity in healthcare

access and quality among demographic groups. The focus of pre-departure preparations had been on preparing students in terms of healthcare knowledge and basic tips for traveling abroad.

## Case

The group of 16 students and one faculty member arrive in Munich, Germany. In each city, the faculty provides background information before the group spends the day engaging in healthcare facility visits, guest lectures, and group tours. In these countries, students noticed the implementation of socialist ideals into everyday life such as public transportation, healthcare, and overall quality of living. Initial cultural differences noted by students included smaller rooms, having to pay for water at restaurants, and water being room temperature when served. The group moved on to Interlaken, Switzerland where students quickly noted the increase in cost of food and extracurricular activities. Although information was provided in advance as to what to expect, students expressed to the faculty leader that they were not prepared for the high cost of food in Switzerland.

During the trip, an undergraduate student who identifies as Cuban, July, reported some difficult feelings about the socialist ideas encountered. Socialist ideas promoted by Che Guevara in South America were implemented with government, healthcare, and habits in everyday life in Europe. July felt that the very structure and ideas that Guevara spread led to the downfall of her home country, Cuba. Being Cuban and understanding the deeper history that is not taught in detail due to extreme censorship for support in the Cuban revolution, and witnessing communist support from the locals, felt confusing. It left July wondering how these countries took the same ideas yet flourished, while the original dictatorship collapsed along with its promises.

Understanding the differences in healthcare systems and the origin of healthcare ideals, July couldn't help but wonder about the political mentality of citizens. While walking the streets of Germany, Che Guevara's face was plastered in plain view, not as governmental propaganda, but in local support of ideals. When being asked where July was from, she didn't hesitate to say her home country Cuba, even though she emigrated to the United States. The reaction to July's nationality mostly consisted of communist propaganda spread by Che such as exclaiming "Hasta la Victoria" holding a closed fist in support, being asked how beautiful her country is due to his work, being called a "Cuban princess," and receiving better treatment than her American peers. While proud of efficiently communicating with the locals in a mixed Spanish-Latin vocabulary, July was left with mixed feelings about not only seeing support towards the revolution, but because she was assumed to be a supporter. While Switzerland didn't seem to promote these political ideals as much as Germany, in France, it only seemed to get worse with occasional merchandise that featured Che's image. Overall, July enjoyed the faculty-led program, but was taken aback by the attitudes she encountered towards Cuba and Che Guevara in particular. She reported these feelings to her faculty leader, who wondered if other students had similar experiences.

## Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How would you react if you were in the student's situation?
- How could the faculty leader address July's experience while on the program and turn it into a learning experience? How could they address concerns about costs in Switzerland?
- What kinds of materials should be covered during faculty-led program's pre-departure orientations?
- How can privilege, positionality, and perception affect a student's study abroad experience?
- How can a faculty leader support students with different identities from their own? What resources, local or international, could they draw from?
- How can programs be designed to maximize global learning during short-term study abroad experiences?