

Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad  
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# Special Section Introduction: HBCUs Reimagine Study Abroad - Inclusive and Transformative

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## Background

As international education practitioners and scholars, we continuously strive to create and engage students in cross-cultural and transnational curricular and experiential opportunities that contribute to shaping their critical consciousness as compassionate global citizens. Traditionally, we carve out these spaces of learning, in collaboration with faculty, through the internationalization of the curriculum; with local and overseas partners and communities through study abroad and global experiential opportunities; and alongside university and academic leaders as we seek to advance other global initiatives.

Starting in March 2020, the sober realities of social distancing, international travel bans, and national lockdowns upended many of those physical and relational modalities and collaborations; in other cases, it ended our very livelihoods. At the same time, the global pandemic spurred seemingly relentless, senseless, and despicable acts of racial terror against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Reflecting on the past three years, the “tri-pandemic” of the global COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Blackness, and the global rise of nationalism and anti-immigration sentiments have created a watershed moment in study abroad, in general, and for higher

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education institutions, in particular, to grapple with the repercussions and reverberations that have continued to resound.

## Introducing the Special Section

As three Black international educators, practitioners, and scholars, we were concerned about the discourse at our institutions and in our professional communities. The discourse was of a return to normal, which failed to reckon with the racial, regional, and global disparities and realities of the “tri-pandemic” to which we were bearing witness in our own lives and in the lived experiences of our students. The inspiration for this special section arose from our mutual interest to call on other like-minded voices from the field seeking instead to reimagine, with nuance and a deep commitment to diversity: a) transformative approaches to study abroad that center justice-oriented global education; b) transnational collaborations in teaching and learning; and c) inclusive virtual exchanges. While the foundation of this special section is rooted in scholarship, we also recognized that we needed to listen to the plurality of voices in the field, such as study abroad advisors and program directors, some of whom identify as non-scholars. We followed with this recognition as we, the special section editors, hold ourselves to account to reimagine praxis-as-research. Therefore, this series presents the diverse voices and forms of knowledge of practitioners, which offer relatable and nuanced portraits into the everyday practices of transformative teaching and learning.

Most fundamentally, we also seek to redress the persistent underrepresentation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the scholarship on study abroad. In part, this is a reflection of the limited understanding of the longstanding historical contributions of HBCU study abroad initiatives which helped to pioneer and illuminate how intersectionality, power, and privilege reveal multifaceted contexts of transnational opportunities and realities. In the past and present, HBCUs have responded and continue to adapt to support evolving shifts in international education and the emerging needs of students from more diverse ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Founded to educate and support multilocal and diverse communities that have long been disenfranchised and marginalized in higher education in the United States, HBCUs contribute to providing a wide range of inclusive policies, innovative practices, and strategic approaches that link pedagogies, solidarities, and equity and inclusion to challenge, reshape, and inform key tenets in advancing social justice in education, including study abroad.

Here too, as special section editors, each of us brings a unique personal and professional insight to the contributions of HBCUs in education abroad, having served as directors of education abroad programs at HBCUs, or as a graduate of a HBCU who benefited from a study abroad program while enrolled as a student there. Importantly, as scholars, we have contributed to the growing research on HBCUs and international education (Diabate, 2017; Poloma & Szelenyi, 2018; Stevenson et al, 2019; Stevenson et al, 2018; Shannon-Ramsey & Stevenson, 2018; Stevenson et al, 2022). By highlighting the dynamic, diverse, and justice-oriented experiences, perspectives, and lessons emerging from HBCUs, we hope to present the plurality of institutional practices. That said, the reflections of these contributing authors do not reflect a monolithic, essentialist, or exceptional portrait of education abroad at all HBCUs. HBCUs represent a diverse class of institutions with varying approaches and practices. In 2020, there were 101 HBCUs located in 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, including 52 public institutions and 49 private nonprofit ones (NCES, n.d.).

## Purpose and Content

The purpose of the special section, then, can be summarized in three aims. One is to foreground the emergent and effective pedagogical practices from HBCUs by presenting the work of leading scholar-practitioners who are reimagining what it means to study abroad, both beyond borders and after the global pandemic experience. In *Black Internationalization for a Post-Covid Era*, author Tonija Hope asks how a better understanding of Black Internationalism can inform how researchers examine the contributions of HBCUs to global inclusion and social justice-oriented approaches to education abroad. Hope traces the historic commitments by HBCUs in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to at-risk refugee students and scholars from Nazi Germany, racially disenfranchised international students from the Caribbean and Africa as well as the contributions of HBCU faculty to the pan-African and postcolonial movements in the Global South as a means of strengthening Black diasporic communities. Hope argues that integrating the principles of Black Internationalism into contemporary approaches in education abroad is necessary to the efforts to combat the resounding impacts of the “tri-pandemic” and as we strive towards decolonizing study abroad.

The second aim is to exemplify the collaborative and cross-institutional efforts of HBCUs. In *PV Goes Global: Reimagining Intercultural Learning & Global Student Mobility at Prairie View A&M University*, Stephanie Tilley,

Nathan Mitchell, Marcus King, and Godlove Fonjweng describe their leadership praxis and institutional approaches, both on and off campus, as they reimagined study abroad and global engagement during the pandemic and analyzed the impact of those challenges and interventions on the future of study abroad on their campus. By joining forces with other HBCUs to create multilocal and intergenerational spaces that seek to bring together Black students with Black alumni living and working globally, the authors also highlight integrative strategies and practices of resilience within a new context of global Black solidarities and belonging.

The third and final aim is to draw on the many lessons and highlight the strategies study abroad programs at HBCUs developed as they reimagined justice-oriented education in the context of their global education programming and priorities. Arguably, HBCUs have long-standing experiences in advancing racial justice and cross-border solidarity, yet the global pandemic has offered new ways to reimagine and emphasize the importance of global learning.

## Concluding Thoughts

The articles in this special section showcase the prominent examples of emerging best practices and new avenues of global education. By unmasking the important and critical contributions of HBCUs, we hope to learn from the transformation underway in study abroad offices across the country, while also recognizing the historical context of study abroad at HBCUs and foregrounding the effects of the pandemic on contemporary and future study abroad programs and models at these important institutions. Each of these contributing authors not only generously chronicle the profound impacts of the pandemic on study abroad at HBCUs, but also empirically highlight the innovative ways in which study abroad approaches at HBCUs are responsive to new demands and emerging realities in global education.

There is an urgent need and a unique opportunity to re-center inclusive and justice-oriented approaches in education abroad that grapple with the global realities of social and public health issues and challenges, in general. HBCUs can contribute richly to this research, scholarship, and social action that center and empower BIPOC students and scholars. We hope that this special section inspires a future special edition on the contributions of HBCUs to education abroad. We also hope it helps to influence further studies that are culturally rooted in and historically informed by the educational praxis and scholarship of HBCU researchers and practitioners.

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