



INSPIRING EDUCATION ABROAD

The quirky newsletter from your friends at Academic Solutions



MORE GREAT STORIES INSIDE:

- Diversity & Inclusion: our new commitment and programming
- COVID-19: our perspective from Barcelona and London

VIRTUAL GLOBAL INTERNSHIPS: ENHANCING REMOTE-WORKING & INTERCULTURAL SKILLS

Written by Ryan Lorenz
Director

They say that through crises we emerge **more resilient, more creative, and better problem solvers**. At Academic Solutions we intend to emerge in exactly this way. Just a few months ago, the field of international education was not yet contemplating virtual solutions. Sure, they existed in some places, but not across the board. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed everything. It has encouraged us to reflect on the core values and enrichment with which education abroad opportunities provide students, and to find ways in which this can be done through virtual experiences, while we learn to navigate the new normalcy of our environments.

At Academic Solutions we find that **the essence of education abroad experiences is the students' encounters and engagement with difference; identifying, understanding and successfully engaging and learning from difference is the ultimate take-away a student can acquire through their global experience**. In the era of COVID-19, we believe that creating this type of encounter and engagement for our students is more relevant than ever. We are in an extremely globalized world that is suffering a pandemic together, but even in the crisis we share, differences abound. Some communities suffer more than others, some regions of the world have better resources than others, the difference between the global south and the global north is incomparable. As higher education organizations and institutions, it is our responsibility to do what we can to engage our students in global learning environments in order combat xenophobic and isolationist mind-sets.

This is why we are excited to offer our **Summer 2020 Virtual Internship Program** aimed to do just this, all the while providing students with the opportunity to build their remote-intercultural communication and working skills. Please visit this link for full details on the offer, areas of internships, and application process. We would also like to take the opportunity to ask you for your feedback on the situation and **ideas for virtual or other solutions**. We are open and flexible, as always, and want to share in the conversation with you. **Please fill out this form to let us know other virtual solutions you and your team may wish to explore with us!**

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION: OUR NEW COMMITMENT & INITIATIVES

Written by Rachel Mantiñán
Diversity & Inclusion Officer



As many of you already know, at the start of 2020 we began formalizing our **Commitment to Diversity** across all our policies, practices, and procedures for our programs in **Spain, UK, and Tanzania**. Our motivation to do so lies in the awareness that the current, social landscape of study abroad is not fully serving the diverse students enrolled in U.S. universities, whether due to a lack of access, equity, inclusion or, in some cases, diversity. We are committed to ensuring that underserved students know they belong in our programs by working from an inclusive and intersectional perspective to embed systemic change in all that we do. Our initiatives are being led by our new **Diversity and Inclusion Officer**, Rachel Mantiñán, who is **investing efforts horizontally across our ecosystem** by collaborating with sending and host university partners, on-site staff, housing and cultural activities providers, in addition to other local communities in co-creating these inclusive spaces and environments.

Our first year of implementation of these initiatives will be a time to set many of the bases, relationships and resources necessary for a **transformational change at Academic Solutions**. Some of our current initiatives include trainings for our entire team, building a library of student resources that will include insights into local LGBTI+, Black, Latinx, Asian and Religious communities among others in addition to Affordable Barcelona & London Guides, revisiting our Health and Safety material to include a gender perspective on physical, sexual and mental health and safety, and renovating our co-curricular and curricular programming.

Through collaboration with our university partners we hope to expand programming to develop thematic, non-mainstream programs that will attract student profiles that are not currently engaged in Education Abroad. Please have a look at our **Inclusive Thematic Programming Guide** that we have developed to inspire our partners to collaborate with us on new programming to attract new student populations to Barcelona and London. We believe these cities have a place for everyone in them, and we want our prospective students to know that.

Continuing discussions with university partners to **strengthen the pre-departure and on-site support** and experiences our students are given will be central to these new initiatives. Strong partnerships with the educational institutions our students attend, coupled with co-curricular programming and support, will ensure they receive a **holistic and inclusive education abroad** in and out of the classroom.

Lastly, we are pleased to announce that next Fall, along with University of Michigan and Queen Mary University of London, we will be **presenting at the EAIE 2020 Conference to be held in Barcelona, Spain**. We will be sharing practical and actionable findings and experiences of supporting diversity and inclusion in higher education abroad. We hope to share these ideas with you at the conference!

COVID-19: OUR PERSPECTIVE FROM BARCELONA & LONDON

Written by Jaime R. Pombo
Barcelona Housing Coordinator

Who could have imagined our world today only two months ago? Countries closing their borders, massive flight cancellations, mandated stay-at-home confinements, dramatic stoppage of a very significant part of economies around the world, collapse of emergency rooms in many hospitals... It is the effect of the COVID-19 virus, declared a World Pandemic by the WHO on March 11.

The Academic Solutions team -both in Barcelona and London- is working from home, like so many other professionals around the globe. **We are engaging virtually, focusing on professional development, on creative solutions and opportunities for our students**, and working on maintaining the feeling of "team" in this new remote space. Our weekly video conferences in Barcelona and London are occasions for us to share the work completed and in motion. The entire AS team is also taking advantage of this opportunity to take online courses and gain knowledge in specific work areas that will enrich our organization. The current situation allows us to focus and develop this work with greater dedication.

We are looking optimistically to the future! Continuing to enjoy personal free time is crucial to maintaining mental health. Our team finds it is important to devote extra time to those activities or hobbies we can do indoors, at home. Perfecting a guitar technique, writing, practicing yoga, learning a new recipe or gardening, are just some examples of what the AS staff spends their personal time on. This situation is affecting the professional and personal lives of millions of people; in some cases, dramatically. But we are together in this and together we will overcome it. The moment to look back and see, with pride, we passed the test is closer every day.

