

Travel, Education and Experience:  
The Benefits of Global Citizenship in the Classroom and Beyond

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Although I am an American citizen, I have a great deal of international experience. I have personally visited over sixty different countries and have visited every continent but Antarctica. I have lived, worked, conducted and presented research and attended universities in various countries throughout Europe. While my internationalism can be inferred from the syllabi I use in my courses, my internationalism is primarily manifested in the manner in which I present the material to my students and in the manner in which I engage them in discussions.

I currently teach Survey I: Pre-Renaissance art history, which covers art and architecture from the Paleolithic to the Late Gothic periods. In this course, it is standard to address notable ancient monuments such as Stonehenge, the Great Pyramids, the Parthenon and the Ishtar Gate of Babylon. Rather than just repeating information found in books or articles, I am able to make the discussion of these works more immediate and engaging because I have seen all of them in person. Thus, I am able to address questions of size, layout and environment based on real-life interaction with the works in question rather than relying on secondary accounts. I can tell my students my height in relation to the great stones of Stonehenge and I can recount what it is like to be inside one of the pyramids. I am able to discuss the layout of the Acropolis and the particulars of the architecture of the Parthenon because I have seen them for myself. I can tell them about the intricate designs on the glazed bricks of the Ishtar Gate and inform them that it is currently housed two rooms away from another famous, ancient monument, the great Altar of Pergamon. As I have seen this monument of Hellenistic sculpture, I can relate my own observations about the massive frieze that features hundreds of figures carved in high relief. Via my personal experiences, I am able to explain the material to

my students better and I am able to discuss these works in a way that is more engaging for my students. My international experience of seeing these and other works enables me to strike a particular chord with my students and to present the material to them in a way someone without this experience is unable to do.

Consequently, these works cease to be faraway, ancient things that only exist in textbook photos. Instead, students connect more with the fact that these are real, impressive sites that were constructed by actual people. These sites become more accessible. Students begin to wonder about actually visiting these locations someday rather than simply staring at a photograph in a textbook and turning the page. Furthermore, because I have had many wonderful experiences of international travel, I actively encourage my students to see the world. Obviously, international travel can be expensive and is not financially accessible for some. However, I encourage students not to settle for secondhand knowledge of the world; they should, when possible, go out and experience it for themselves in order to gain a deeper knowledge and broader perspective of the world.

My range of international experiences is not only limited to countries with ancient artifacts. I have experiences that affect the way I teach more modern art as well. I also teach Survey II: Renaissance to Modern art history and my international travels influence the way I present material for this class. For instance, I have visited Italy multiple times and I have also lived there on several occasions. This is useful because I have visited various cities throughout Italy, including Rome and Pompeii and am, thus, able to discuss monuments ranging from the Colosseum to the Villa of the Mysteries. However, I also lived in Florence and worked at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, the

museum of the famed Cathedral of Florence. Thus, when discussing the Italian Renaissance with my students, I am able to give them a firsthand account of the art and architecture of this famed city, including Michelangelo's *David* and the aforementioned Duomo. In survey classes, it is typical to discuss the bronze panels Lorenzo Ghiberti created for the East Doors of the Baptistery of San Giovanni. These doors were nicknamed the Gates of Paradise because, when he saw them, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Renaissance master artist and Florentine, remarked they were so beautiful they were fit to be the "Gates of Paradise." Not only can I describe the bronze panels to them in detail but I can talk to them about their Renaissance construction and their contemporary conservation. While these doors are often taught in such classes, it is less often noted that the panels themselves are no longer in situ. In order to protect the originals, copies have been placed on the doors. Many tourists are unaware of this fact so they snap photographs of the copies and then unwittingly walk past the museum, il Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, that houses the real thing.

I worked at this museum when I lived in Florence and I am quite familiar with its collection, including the famed panels of the East Doors and the models for the construction of cathedral's famous dome. Consequently, when I teach my students about the construction of the dome, I am able to discuss the models and the engineering principles behind it, but I am also able to tell my students what it is like to climb the steps to the top of the dome and to look through the oculus at the frescoed interior. In addition, I make a point to teach my students about other works in the Museum's collection which I personally enjoyed viewing. For instance, the Museum also houses Michelangelo's *Pieta* and Donatello's *Mary Magdalene*. I saw these works

on an almost daily basis so when I teach them to students, I am able not only to discuss them in the context of Renaissance art but I am also able to recount anecdotes about visitor's reactions to the works and my own personal observations about the pieces in terms of the physical characteristics of the works and their effects on the viewer.

Once again, because of my own international experiences, my students are given a different perspective on the works and places discussed in class. Via my experiences, I am able to make the material more relatable and accessible to my students, which makes it more fun and interesting for them. Rather than simply having students read about Renaissance Florence, I can supplement that reading with accounts of modern-day life in Florence. As previously mentioned, I actively encourage students to travel, and my discussions about certain places and the art work located there also dovetail with the Art Department's study abroad trips which, recently, have included Italian cities such as Florence.

Lastly, my international mindedness is evident in my engagement with the contemporary art scene and in the manner in which I then relate these experiences to my students. Recently, I completed a fellowship at the Universität-Konstanz which is right on the border between Germany and Switzerland. While at the university, I was able to engage in an academic and cultural dialogue with faculty, staff and students. In addition, I was able to participate in the local art scene in southern Germany and Switzerland, especially Zurich. Afterward, I moved to back Berlin, which is known as being an up-and-coming center for avant-garde contemporary art. In Berlin, in which I had lived several years prior, I was able to once again visit the more traditional art collections, such as the Ägyptisches Museum, which houses the famed ancient

Egyptian bust of Queen Nefertiti, and to experience the emerging, international contemporary art scene. These experiences included taking photographs and videos of avant-garde artists and their works. For instance, German-born Kerstin Brätsch, Mexican-born Mariana Castillo Deball and Cypriot-born Haris Epaminonda are all contemporary artists based in Berlin. Although they work in different media and engage different themes with their work, in recent years, they have all received recognition from the German art world. In addition, they are increasingly becoming internationally known and represented in respected collections, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, at which I also used to work. Not only do these artists influence my own art historical research but, because I share their works with students, many of whom are art majors, I am able to share emergent trends in the international art world and to discuss the various factors that influence practicing artists today. Thus, through my transmission of my own international experiences, my students are made aware of important issues in the international art community and are encouraged to think outside the boxes in which they have placed themselves due to their particular geographic and cultural surroundings.

As an educator, my goal is not to simply teach my students but to encourage them to love learning and to seek knowledge outside the confines of the classroom and beyond the borders of their own state or country. While my international-mindedness might not be immediately evident when one first glances at my syllabi, my unique international experiences have made me the educator I am today and have instilled in me the value of encouraging students to have an awareness of the international arts community. As a result, it is my hope that students will become active participants in

and contributors to this community and that, through their own enriching international experiences, they will, in turn, become more internationally-minded which will benefit not only their immediate university environment but also the larger academic and social communities in which they find themselves both now and in the future.