

## Forum on Education Abroad Conference Report – October 2014

### Frank Mikus, St. John's University Paris

The second European conference of the Forum on Education Abroad was held from October 23-25, 2014 at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain. Hosted by the Association of American Programs in Spain (APUNE), Eduespana, and the Committee for the Internationalisation and Cooperation of Spanish Universities (CICUE), approximately 440 academics and study abroad administrators and practitioners attended conference sessions around the theme “What does it mean to be a ‘traditional’ destination? Challenges and Opportunities for Education Abroad in Europe.” According to Forum President and CEO Brian Whalen, two-thirds of conference participants are based in Europe and the additional third is based on college campuses in the US.

In addition to six pre-conference workshops that focused on the Forum's *Standards of Good Practice*, a total of 36 working sessions were offered in six separate time slots over the course of the three-day conference. Session formats varied (town hall-style, round tables), though there was a marked preference on the part of presenters for interactive, round-table-style discussions. Four sessions were presented by APUAF members:

- Scott Blair (CEA Paris): Understanding Europe: Why the "Traditional" Matters
- Lucile Duperron (Dickinson en France and Dickinson College): The Development of a Multilingual Writing Center at Home and Abroad
- Lisa Fleury (Vassar Wesleyan Program in Paris) Laura Raynaud (Dickinson en France): Stimulating Intergenerationality: Millennials in Europe
- Frank Mikus (St. John's University Paris), Bernard Zirnheld (St. John's University Paris): Adding a Non-European Excursion to a European Study Abroad Program

Presentation topics, sometimes recurrent, included an investigative look at curriculum development and in particular the sometimes-contested role of experiential learning, the challenges of creating successful short-term programming, travel within an academic context, stimulating intergenerationality in study abroad, and programmatic engagement with multicultural and post-colonial Europe. A number of sessions looked specifically at individual program philosophies in open dialogues on how to position themselves in relation to other, more “exotic” destinations now available to U.S. study abroad students. Certain sessions spoke directly to the numbers: at present, 53% of U.S. students studying abroad choose a destination in Europe/Russia. Among that population, Western Europe is still the favorite destination with the UK holding the unique position of receiving more US study abroad students than any other country in the world.

Conference participants reported that highlights were Dr. Milton Bennett and Ida Castiglioni's talk on intercultural learning in multicultural Europe in addition to Charles and Anne Schewe (Sara's Wish Foundation) who offered a parent's perspective on what to do when tragedy occurs in the study abroad context.

Personal highlights for me included Scott Carpenter (Carleton College) and Ian Terkildsen (Danish Institute for Study Abroad)'s presentation entitled "Expanding the Traditional Study Abroad Destination and Experience through Travel within an Academic Context." This session explored the philosophy and theory behind of out-of-host-country travel, provided concrete examples in the form of two different operational program models, and facilitated a constructive conversation on how to adapt these practices to different program models. I also appreciated Lisa Fleury and Laura Raynaud's session on intergenerationality for its original subject matter and "real-world" content that underscored broad cross-generational challenges and opportunities for the future of education abroad in Europe.

My attendance at the conference was beneficial as it permitted me to strengthen my understanding of topics relevant to the field of education abroad. I also found it useful to exchange and network with colleagues from other parts of Europe and the US. Most importantly, the opportunity to present was invaluable to me. This was my first time presenting at a professional conference; the research, preparation, and experience of public speaking have all contributed positively to my professional development in education abroad.