

## **APUAF - VOICES IN THE FIELD 2017 CONFERENCE**

### **“Whats up with Generation Z?”**

The American Library in Paris - 10 Rue du Général Camou, 75007 Paris

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### **Digital Narratives & Study Abroad Student Panel Response**

Fiona Palmer (Saint John's University)

Elizabeth Taft (Wellesley College)

Jesse Tanson (The College of William & Mary / IFE Strasbourg)

Generation Z is growing up! The post-millennial generation is entering college and participating in study abroad programs. Born in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, Generation Z is often described as technology-reliant, private, and independent. How are universities and study abroad programs adapting to the needs of this generation? This question was the focus of the APUAF-sponsored Voices in the Field Conference. After thoughtfully analyzing the Digital Narratives & Study Abroad Survey created by APUAF members, we spoke to a room of study abroad professionals about how our personal experiences coincide with the results of the survey, concentrating on technology and travel.

The young person or teen addicted to a phone is a tired cliché, but it is not without reason. We all admitted that we use our phones throughout the day for just about everything: email, messaging, maps. Sometimes phone apps helped us connect with French language and culture. Snapchat, for example, presents the user with entertainment and interactive news based on location, so only French content was available to us in France. Other apps, such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, made it easy to send texts and images back home to parents anxious to know how we were doing. We generally didn't feel that our phones took away from our experience, but made it easier for us to navigate our new surroundings, both figuratively and literally.

For young travelers, the phone is the single most important tool for searching sights to see, finding directions, and taking pictures. More study abroad students seem to be traveling within and without their host country, with certain cities (London, Amsterdam) especially popular. Their travels are thoroughly documented in phone photography, which is then posted on social media to be liked and commented on by friends and family at home. The three of us took a few international trips, but traveled less than our surveyed peers and those in our programs, some of whom traveled every month or even every weekend. While we felt the occasional trip was not detrimental to our experience, we each felt that the level of immersion we achieved would not have been possible had we traveled often simply because we would not have spent enough time in our host cities.

Student travel presents a challenge to program leaders, who are charged with not only their students' education, but also their safety.

Technology provides for students to rely less on their programs leaders and more on internet suggestions. The relationship of student to program leader is evolving. Students seek out greater autonomy, as independence is a key feature of Generation Z.

There was a question of whether or not students need to provide programs leaders with cell phone numbers and other information. With regards to that question, some students feel it unnecessary and almost intrusive to have to give out a phone number on top of all of the other information that they must give to program leaders. Furthermore, as independence is key to study abroad, giving out a phone number can be seen as reducing independence, though this depends on the program. For instance, with a program including an internship, a phone number is required less for the program itself, but rather for internship period during which students are employees at various institutions.

How does tech impact experience, is it enhanced, how does this affect travel patterns? We found that technology influences the study abroad experience to the extent that someone uses it for him or herself or for other individuals in their lives. With the rise of technology and the ability to share one's life with everyone they know, has come the idea of study abroad, which is going to as many places on the "global checklist" (Paris, London, Barcelona, etc) as possible, not for personal pleasure, but for the appearance of having become a global citizen, a world traveler(usually for one's friends and family back home). That being said, the ideas and images promoted of study abroad can push students and guide students to places they had never heard of and can lead them to create memories from ideas.