

Conference Highlights

Over 200 professionals in the international education field gathered in Bologna, Italy from Wednesday, November 12th through Friday, November 14th, 2025 for the 2nd European Institute, co-sponsored by EUASA and the Forum on Education Abroad. As with Strasbourg in 2023, this edition received overly positive feedback. The conference was hosted by the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, where attendees were spoiled by a near constant drip of the very best “catered coffee” we had ever tasted. The Thursday night reception was also delicious, not to mention beautiful.

Gen Z and AI continue to be hot topics, as outlined below in the notes on the four panels. However, the new format of quick briefs by several presenters during the last session allowed the introduction of a variety of other topics. As always, there were a wide range of conversations popping up during informal moments - coffee breaks, walks to and from the venue, meals and even waiting in line for the bathroom!

APUAF was exceptionally well represented, and 25 members attended. Kelly Bohan (Brown in Paris) was amongst the presenters, and Mary Boyington represented the APUAF on the conference organizing committee.

Bologna once again set the bar high for the next edition, due in the fall of 2027, location yet to be determined..

NOVEMBER 2025



The Forum on Education Abroad European Institute: Bologna, Italy (November 2025)

Gen Z and Education Abroad: Strategies for Resilience, Education and Learning

Presenters:

- Kelly Bohan (Program Coordinator, Brown University Program in Paris)
- Megan Griffin (Assistant Director, Student Conduct and Engagement, Florida State University International Programs)
- Joanne Maddux (Founder and professional counselor, Centered Counseling and Educational Experiences)
- Mags Runge (Wellness counselor, Kent State University in Florence, licensed clinical psychologist)

Jonathan Haidt's book ["The Anxious Generation"](#) (Penguin, 2024) was referred to often throughout this panel and is interesting reading for anyone working with Gen Z students.

Gen Z experienced rising levels of anxiety disorders and mental health challenges beginning in pre-adolescence. This trend was not incidental but due to 3 significant changes to childhood and adolescence over the last 20 years:

- A decline in play-based childhood (limits opportunities to develop social competencies such as collaboration, conflict resolution, and resilience)
- High digital immersion (6-8 hours of daily social media use)
- Increased academic pressure and prolonged dependence on parental support

As a result, Gen Z has underdeveloped interpersonal skills. They also suffer from conflict avoidance. However, at the same time, they have heightened emotional expression and mental health awareness, strong value orientation and a significant social consciousness. Most annoyingly for educators, perhaps, they seem to have a "selective sense of urgency" (e.g. their housing not suiting their preferences is much more important/urgent than a paper deadline).

How did this happen?

First, the parents of Gen Z lived through a series of geopolitical crises - The Cold War, 9/11, Gulf Wars as well as 2 major economic crises (1987, 2008). Then, they waited to have kids and now have a higher emotional and financial investment than past generations.

Both groups (our students and their parents) have experienced the advent of smartphones and social media, heightened political polarization, the opioid epidemic, the drastic rise in school shootings and major social conflicts such as MeToo and Black Lives Matter.

All of these events have produced a worldview shaped by perceived instability and risk, reinforcing anxiety and risk aversion. The collective trauma of COVID produced lasting psychological and behavioral effects in everyone, but was particularly detrimental to the young.

These students are less likely to trust others. They also show lower cortisol output (stress dysregulation), increased chronic inflammation and reduced prefrontal cortex activity (affecting

decision-making and emotional regulation). They are, therefore, more vulnerable than past generations, particularly when under stress.

They might cope through avoidance or numbing behaviors, including excessive use of social media, substances, work, exercise, food...

This also leads to: chronic absenteeism, reduced attention span, difficulty engaging with discomfort or opposing viewpoints, lower resilience following setbacks, mental health challenges affecting memory, focus, and motivation.

We see the effects of this in our field, for example, in housing (conflict avoidance, blurred boundaries between friends/roommates, unclear expectations) and language-learning (disruption in language-learning during the pandemic, translation apps and anglo digital spaces that permit avoidance).

Students are asking for more and more support through accommodations (both academic and housing), “mental health days,” and even support animals. They have multiple sources of stress, from poor sleep and/or physical health, to financial factors, as well as social isolation (physically far from family and friends, but also possibly ostracized from on-site peers) and lack of access to their usual support at home.

Parents are intervening more and more (“helicopter” or “lawnmower” style), which actually increases anxiety and depression amongst students and stunts autonomy and growth. It also creates tension and unrealistic expectations for staff, which leads to burnout. As professionals, we need to encourage more independence amongst our students, expecting more responsibility from them (and less intervention from staff). We can’t fix these students, but we can help them by providing tools for conflict resolution and self-management and supporting them as they navigate the ambiguity and discomfort that is a natural and necessary part of study abroad.

Well-being should also be promoted as a learning outcome. Programs can embed it into their design through activities like community engagement and art exposure.

We can take a realistic look at our expectations, compared to students’ expectations for the same experience. We need to reframe the narrative on study abroad (not always “exciting,” but “dynamic”). Materials (particularly pre-departure) need to be clear and concise. Messaging needs to be realistic - expect change and challenges. Most importantly, we must create a compassionate community with resources for well-being for students AND staff.

Finally, Kelly discussed how our students are using social media and what we can do to harness this use “for good”. Her presentation referenced an article from Frontiers by Patrick Merle, [All Roads Leave From Florence](#) on the topic of travel vs. academics in short term study abroad, as well as an article she co-wrote - [Scrolling Across Borders: Student Insights on Study Abroad in Europe in the Digital Age](#).

As we already know, social media is an unavoidable part of the student experience at home as well as on study abroad. 87% of students actively use social media while studying abroad. A majority are using it as a source of information before they leave. They are using it to plan activities and travel while abroad and then to post about those experiences, which feeds the eco-system of other students looking for that type of content in order to plan their study abroad experience...

What does this mean?

Students are prioritizing travel/experiences over academics. They have unrealistic/glamourized expectations (Emily in Paris Syndrome). Some suffer from self-imposed pressure to do and see certain things and to ENJOY (or pretend to enjoy?) those things or suffer the consequences (FOMO).

All of this contributes to the commodification and homogenization of the study abroad experience, not to mention overtourism and sometimes anti-American sentiment in some of our program locations and anywhere deemed “Instagrammable”...

However, there are ways in which we can try to use social media to our advantage. As previously mentioned, we can promote accounts in the target language, by local residents, for on-site activities. We can encourage students to use it as a tool for immersion and integration into the local community. We can also use it as a powerful pre-departure communication tool to show a balanced view of the actual study abroad experience.

Conflict and Wellbeing as Tools for Powerful Learning

Presenters:

- Troy Gordon (Director of Global Teaching and Learning for Syracuse University Abroad)
- Joanne Maddux (Founder and professional counselor, Centered Counseling and Educational Experiences)
- Mags Runge (Wellness counselor, Kent State University in Florence, licensed clinical psychologist)
- David Wick (Chair of International Educational Management, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey)

This panel addressed the idea that conflict is normal. It is not inherently negative, but is inevitable and can be a useful catalyst for transformation.

Troy kicked off the conversation with a very thought-provoking look at conflict in a global context and the impact it has on our students and our work. We (and our students) are living in an era of increasing political violence and armed conflicts. This is becoming the status quo, and the emphasis is no longer on peace-making and collaboration as it was at the end of the Cold War.

Because Gen Z is chronically online, they are highly informed and very emotionally affected by these global events. They have also been socialized in very polarized environments over the last 2 decades (US politics, Black Lives Matter, Israeli/Palestinian conflict, MeToo...). Therefore, disagreements between students, for example, that used to be personal in nature are now often overshadowed by larger, global issues. Conflict is perceived to be the opposite of well-being. Whereas, we know that there is a sweet spot where conflict, well-being and learning can and should converge.

What people seek is a way to control their trauma/conflict and feel some sort of agency over their existence. How do we do this?

- Recognize how we are affected
- Question our assumptions about it
- Identify what is and what is not within our control
- Act purposefully on what we can control
- Practice holding ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity

Many APUAF members were fortunate to participate in David Wick's workshop on conflict transformation in Paris just a few weeks prior to the Institute. That workshop offered a thorough exploration of transforming conflict for positive results. Because of time restraints, his participation in this panel was not as in-depth. We recommend that members review the readings and slides from the October 2025 APUAF workshop.

During this panel, he discussed different conflict styles and the fact that there is no universally correct style. Each has its positives and negatives and their effectiveness depends on the context, power dynamics and cultural norms at play. That being said, collaboration generally promotes learning and strengthens relationships. David underlined the fact that conflict is deeply influenced by identity and cultural frameworks. This leads to 2 results for students studying abroad:

- They interpret situations based on their intersecting identities (nationality, race, political beliefs...).
- They sometimes misinterpret behaviors or statements in the host culture.

Well-being and its relationship to conflict was also discussed at length. They are not, in fact, two opposing forces, but intrinsically connected and are essential for learning and development.

The presenters used several case studies from the world of study abroad and encouraged small-group conversation amongst attendees.

In conclusion, Troy connected conflict to the extreme online presence of Gen Z, which dovetailed nicely with the themes of the earlier panel and the conversation around the influence of the internet and social media on our students. Digital spaces seem to be adding to the misunderstanding between groups and amplifying the polarization. As a result, we are starting to see some online fatigue amongst Gen Z. They are actively taking steps to distance themselves from digital culture and reclaim their time by reducing their online presence, being more intentional in their use of technology and focusing their attention elsewhere.

Ultimately, our goal should not to eliminate conflict, but to help our students to engage with it thoughtfully and constructively.

The field of artificial intelligence has moved at extraordinary speed. Presenters referred to the period of 'disruption and panic' in 2023 giving way to a phase of 'integration and strategic adaptation' in 2025. We are now living, as one session framed it, in an 'algorithmic age' — not a future concept but a present reality reshaping every facet of higher education. The presentations emphasized the over-reaching use of AI by Gen Z and the importance of understanding the implications as well as staff and faculty training.



Why AI Matters to Study Abroad

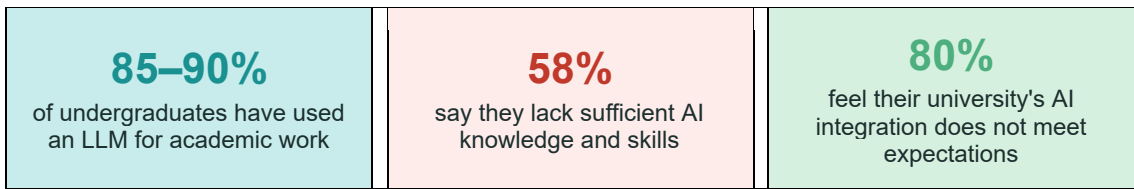
Key 2025 Milestones

- Over 200 CEOs pushed for AI education initiatives
- Microsoft, OpenAI, and Anthropic jointly funded a national AI academy for teachers
- ChatGPT launched Study Mode; Google introduced Guided Learning in Gemini; Anthropic released a Learning Mode for Claude
- GPT-5 was released; Google committed \$1 billion to AI training in higher education
- Universities including Syracuse, Northeastern, and UNSW adopted AI tools campus-wide

Major AI Platforms: Distinct Pedagogical Identities

Platform	Learning Mode	Best Suited For
ChatGPT	Study Mode	Socratic tutoring with dynamic, adaptive dialogue
Gemini	Guided Learning	Interactive digital textbook with structured lesson flows
Claude	Learning Mode	Research companion for persistent, document-heavy projects
Copilot	—	Microsoft 365 workflow integration

Student use of AI is now near-universal. Surveys show 85–90% of undergraduates have used a large language model (LLM) for academic work, with 73% reporting increased use compared to the previous year. Yet despite this heavy usage, students feel significantly underprepared for an AI-enabled world.



Other generations (Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials) who primarily use it for information retrieval and productivity. Gen Z is using AI for identity exploration, personal support, creative assistance as well as learning and education at the highest levels.

“How People Use AI”

Therapy	Companionship	Idea generation	Brainstorming	Organizing life	Enhance learning	Other
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How Students Use AI for Academic Work	
Brainstorming ideas	57%
Drafting outlines	50%
Generating drafts	44%
Summarising readings	35%

AI Platform Adoption Among Students	
ChatGPT	74%
Gemini	43%
Grammarly	38%
Copilot	29%
Claude	25%
Perplexity	16%

"Cheating is a symptom, not the disease. The real issue is that academic systems have historically rewarded the appearance of mastery rather than the process of thinking."

Opportunities, Risks & Equity Considerations

Presenters were careful to frame AI neither as saviour nor threat, but as a powerful tool whose impacts depend entirely on how institutions choose to deploy it. The same technology that can reduce inequality may, without deliberate policy, actively amplify it.

<p>Potential Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Personalised learning pathways with real-time adaptive feedback ▶ Automatic captioning and real-time translation lowering barriers for neurodivergent and multilingual students ▶ Predictive analytics enabling early intervention for at-risk students ▶ AI-driven research enabling rapid synthesis across vast digitised archives 	<p>Key Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Cognitive offloading: students may atrophy critical thinking by over-relying on AI outputs ▶ Cultural standardisation: most AI models use US-based, Anglophone research, marginalising other ways of knowing ▶ Growing inequality: top universities providing access to premium tools amplifies existing gaps ▶ Surveillance risks: pervasive keystroke or biometric tracking without informed consent
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▶ Reduction of bias and support for students with learning disabilities	▶ Standardisation of language and thought through AI vocabulary feedback loops
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Faculty Sentiment on AI

<p style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold; color: #559955;">57%</p> <p>hold a positive view of AI in education</p>	<p style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold; color: #559955;">64%</p> <p>believe AI will bring significant change to their role</p>	<p style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold; color: #cc0000;">80%</p> <p>report institutional AI guidelines are not comprehensive</p>
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Study Abroad as a Vital Counterweight

A central and energising theme of the European Institute was the positioning of study abroad as a vital counterweight to what presenters called 'disembodied' AI education. While AI systems are powerful, they lack sensory richness — the 'touch, smell, sound, and taste' that real-world immersive learning demands.

"By 2027, over 60% of workers will need retraining. Tech leaders now prioritise uniquely human traits — tolerance of ambiguity, curiosity, resilience, and relationship-building — qualities best developed through immersive international experience."

The Skills the Future Demands

While the World Economic Forum predicts AI skills will be the top employer requirement by 2030, technology leaders consistently point to qualities that AI cannot replicate: tolerance of ambiguity, curiosity, resilience, and the ability to build authentic human relationships. These are precisely the capacities that international education has always been designed to develop.

Encountering Different AI Ecosystems as Education

Presenters also noted that studying abroad exposes students to markedly different AI regulatory and cultural frameworks — for example, the contrasts between US and EU approaches to AI governance. This itself constitutes a critical form of learning, building awareness of how technology reflects political and cultural agendas and resisting the tendency toward uncritical adoption.

Practical Guidance for Educators

The sessions closed with actionable guidance. The consensus was clear: a passive approach to AI — ignoring it or hoping students won't use it — leads to more academic dishonesty, reduced student-teacher contact, and growing inequity. The alternative is active, thoughtful engagement.

1	<p>Verify and Validate</p> <p>Faculty must remain the primary validators of content. Always check AI outputs for accuracy and embedded bias before incorporating them into teaching or curriculum.</p>
2	<p>Use AI as a Thought Partner, Not a Thought Substitute</p> <p>Teach students to use AI for brainstorming and collaborative problem-solving — not to replace their own reasoning. The goal is augmented, not automated, thinking.</p>
3	<p>Redesign Evaluation Methods</p> <p>Traditional assessment methods are becoming increasingly vulnerable. Consider oral exams, place-based assignments, and process-focused portfolios that AI cannot easily replicate.</p>

4	Root Learning in Local Culture Create 'unmediated experiences' — especially in international settings — that ground students in embodied, sensory, and culturally specific knowledge that no AI can simulate.
5	Establish Transparent AI Policies Classroom policies should specify clearly when AI is permitted, how to cite it, and what accountability students bear for AI-generated content. Policies must be living documents, regularly revisited.
6	Prioritise Data Privacy Never input confidential student data into commercial AI tools. Ensure students give informed consent regarding how their data may be used by AI platforms.

Seven Principles for AI in Education

The session concluded with a framework calling on institutions to ground all AI use in seven core principles, treating AI not as a novelty but as core educational infrastructure requiring sustained investment, clear guidelines, and ongoing human oversight.

Purpose	Compliance	Knowledge	Balance	Integrity	Agency	Evaluation
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This report was prepared from notes taken while attending the European Institute. IA was used to organize those notes into to this report format and create graphics.

Conference Quick Briefs

15-minute TED-style presentations celebrating program successes in International Education



Enhancing Cross-Cultural Communication: Supporting Sponsors for Stronger Internship Outcomes

European Institute 2025

November 13-14 | Bologna, Italy

Marta Brambilla
Academic Department & Internship Manager



Bridging Communication Gaps in International Internships

The primary barrier to successful international internships is not student skill or motivation, but a breakdown in communication. Brambilla proposes a model where international educators act as "bridges" to help sponsors navigate differences between explicit and implicit communication styles. The IES Milan program offers workshops for internship sponsors, enabling clearer communication, better productivity, and stronger internship outcomes.



Supporting Students Sustaining Staff:
Redrawing the Boundaries of On-Site Care

European Institute 2025


November 13-14 | Bologna, Italy

Erin Tschupp
Senior Programs Coordinator
Accent Global Learning



From High-Touch to High-Trust: Redrawing Staff Boundaries

On-site staff have shifted from cultural mentors to "travel agents, therapists, and dispute mediators" due to a 24/7 instant-access culture. This "boundary creep" leads to burnout and role confusion. London staff counter this with a high-trust model, coaching students toward independence. Key takeaway introduced at orientation: "We support you, not serve you" — paired with clear office hours, crisis protocols, and student leadership roles.




Climate Action Is Our Business

Why International Educators Hold Unmatched Power to Cut Emissions

European Institute 2025

November 13-14 | Bologna, Italy

Margherita Pasquini,
Director of Sustainable Partnerships
Alethea Global Cooperative



Climate Action Is Our Business

Over 80% of the world's population has never taken a flight, yet study abroad students belong to the estimated 5–6% who do. A compelling opening pie chart showed that all of us will be affected by climate change. Presenters challenged the education sector to take moral responsibility — from the Latin *respondeo*, "the capacity to respond" — to lead students toward awareness of their role in a fragile global ecosystem. Discussion prompts: Have you considered your study abroad environmental impact? How can we minimize it together?



Connecting Art and Community in Florence

European Institute 2025

November 13-14 | Bologna, Italy

Staging Shakespeare in a Nursing Home

Elisabetta Santanni, Accademia Europea di Firenze
with Francesco Gori and Matteo Pecorini

Connecting Art and Community in Florence

A 15-week community-based global learning course had students collaborate with elderly nursing home residents to rewrite and stage Shakespearean plays. Focused on creative placemaking and social responsibility, the course built nonverbal communication skills and empathy while providing residents with cognitive and social stimulation. A video of student-resident connections drew an overwhelmingly positive response at the Institute. Student takeaways included life-long lessons in human connection and a true sense of purpose.



Supporting Undiagnosed Neurodivergent Students Abroad

European Institute 2025

November 13-14 | Bologna, Italy

Shani St.Louis founder of MindHurst
Mental Health and Wellbeing Services for
International Students.



Supporting Undiagnosed Neurodivergent Students Abroad

Many students with neurodivergent minds — including ADHD and Autism — may lack a formal diagnosis yet struggle with the sensory and social demands of studying abroad. The presenter drew on her own experience as an undiagnosed neurodivergent student abroad, proposing a universal design and strengths-based framework. The core insight: materials designed to help neurodivergent students ultimately help all students better understand program policies and procedures.



Looking Forward: Wisdom, Leadership and the Future of Global Education

European Institute 2025

November 13-14 | Bologna, Italy

Lina Rodríguez, PhD
Assistant Vice Provost for Global Learning
Lehigh University
angelina.rodriguez@lehigh.edu

Looking Forward: Wisdom, Leadership & the Future of Global Education

The world is at a "threshold moment" — a metacrisis of uncertainty, grief, and overwhelm. Global education holds unique wisdom: embracing paradox, living with complexity, managing crises, and leading with ethics and care. A survey of on-site staff explored private practices such as meditation and nature immersion, finding that this "inner work" fosters greater empathy, humility, and long-term perspective — allowing educators to interact more relationally and accept complexity in their roles.

