Intercultural Engagement Competency Essay

- In your own words, what is intercultural engagement? Why do intercultural engagement skills matter?

Bringing people together of differing backgrounds, cultures and identities with the intent purpose of developing mutual understandings is often the goal of intercultural engagements. An environment needs to be created where people are able to leave their comfort zone of their own identity and are invited to engage in the activities of another culture. Engagement is best done with the understanding that participants may be fully naïve, but as long as people are willing to learn cultural engagement is effective. An example of an intercultural engagement is American Indian Night, that was an open invitation event with a focus on indigenous dance and language.

Throughout life people will be interacting with other cultures both with and without intent. People may choose to travel to a different culture, learn a new language or explore cultural events and having skills to engage others will make those experiences more enlightening and enjoyable. Intercultural engagement skills can also be beneficial when least expected, such as randomly meeting people at school or work. For example, let’s say you start a new job and your co-worker in the cubical next to you is on a work visa from a country you know nothing about.

-What past and/or present experiences have you had so far that have helped you develop your intercultural engagement abilities? What did you learn from these experiences? Why does that learning matter?

As a result of being a SCUBA diver I have had the opportunity to travel to remote countries and islands from the Pacific to the Caribbean and have had the opportunity to be exposed to isolated cultures. During these visits there are often the excursions that are planned as intercultural events, such as cooking classes, craft demonstrations and environmental awareness. These experiences have allowed me to be more aware of how cultures are developed and structured. An example was a visit to the Island of Yap and how large stones were used as currency. Since the island was so small, they were only able to create an open-door prison, prisoners roamed the streets during the day and slept in the prison at night. Informal cultural exposure would often happen as well, for example the crew on one of the diving boats would chew on something called Betel Nut (Areca nut). The nut was supposed to contain a stimulant like caffeine. So yes, I tried it and it was just a nut.

Learning intercultural skills matters as it allows one to navigate through life more effectively. As the world becomes more digital and people migrate more frequently skills will become necessary to succeed.

-What future experiences would you like to have to continue developing your intercultural engagement skills? How will these experiences help you grow in your cultural competence?

I have yet to participate in a formal study abroad program. Mankato state does have one opportunity that involves SCUBA which might be a good fit. My plan is to contact the Center for Education Abroad and Away and review the available options. One barrier is my lack of a second language, unfortunately many of these programs fall under foreign language majors. Taking a formalized structured intercultural engagement with reading materials, instruction and supervision will provide a more fulfilling experience. Most experiences have been informal, and though beneficial a more formal engagement will most likely provide greater insight.