Indigenous Students on Study Abroad: Conducting Research in Costa Rica with the Ngäbe

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The logistics

- 7 days at the Las Cruces research station
- 12 undergrad students from across the US, all STEM majors
- 7 mentors
- 7 research projects
Previous research/paper

• An Indigenous Intercambio Program: Empowering Underrepresented STEM Students to Participate in Scientific and Cultural Exchange Through Study Abroad
• Authors: Jessica Black, Stephany RunningHawk Johnson, Denise Silfee, and Celestino Mariano Gallardo
• This work done with Heritage University, 2 students, in Panama
A different type of study abroad

- Social justice in study abroad programming
- Creating equity in participation
- Anticolonial framework
- Host community needs and wants
Research questions

• What does having an international research experience do for Indigenous students? (personally as well as educationally)
• How important is the cultural exchange between participants?
• For students, how important is it to have an Indigenous mentor?
• What did US participants learn from the Ngäbe and how do they view study abroad/international work differently as a result of this experience?
• Did students change their plans/thoughts/ideas about further research or graduate school as a result of this experience?
Focus on the cultural

- Student to student
- Student to mentor
- US Indigenous groups to Ngäbe
Methods

- Followed students, mentors, and Ngäbe around for the week
- Interviews
- Posters and presentations
Time spent building relationships
Initial data analysis

• This is very preliminary!
• Students see themselves in different ways in a different country
• Spending this time with a group of Indigenous scholars is hugely impactful for the students and the mentors
• Mixed data on the importance of having an Indigenous mentor
• The multiple cultural exchanges going on were invaluable to participants
• Having the Ngäbe present was incredibly important and we could structure this better in the future
Next steps

- More interviews!
- More data analysis!
- More papers!
- More research!
Thank you!

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