“Vorrei Prendere Il Treno!” (I Want to Take the Train): A narrative about how one Inclusive Recreation Services study abroad course helped students to understand challenges people with disabilities confront while traveling abroad
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Abstract
It was Florida International University’s most unusual study abroad course this year. Compared to most study abroad programs that focus on art and culture, the Inclusive Recreation Services course, taught in Miami, FL; Florence, Italy; and Paris, France, focused on challenges people with disabilities confront while traveling. In addition to learning about disability groups, attitudes about disabilities, accessibility and recreation programming, and the Americans with Disabilities Act, this class included a review of, and comparison to, Italian and French disability laws, as well as hands on experiences designed to give students a perspective gained from experiencing challenges associated with accessing buildings, roads, and public transportation in cities with extensive histories. This article provides a description of select learning activities and information learned presented in a narrative format.

Key words: study abroad, inclusion, accessibility, disability

Introduction
It is 9:00 AM and we are on the Paris Metro heading to a conference being held at a hotel near the Grande Arche to give a presentation on a paper we had written on international recreational therapy and inclusion. We leave the hotel and walk a few blocks before descending into a hectic and busy maze of tunnels. We find a place to stand and wait for the train that would get us to the Metro stop located near the conference hotel. We ascend on to the train. It is crowded and hot. A couple speaking Russian are straddling their carry on suitcases while holding on tightly to safety bars. A college student who has his arms wrapped around a backpack he has placed on his lap is seated next to a door. A French business woman carrying a briefcase in one hand is standing and reading a book that she is holding with her other hand no more than 2 in from her face. That arm is wrapped around a pole to provide her with stability. The train stops. Some people push their way out of trains while others push their way in before the doors close. This happens at each stop.

That was in 2010 but could be any day in Paris, France. Over the past 8 years, I have ridden countless trains to get to conference locations, museums, friends’ lofts, or just to see where I end up. Each time, I celebrate what I see as something magical, even nostalgic, about the storied Paris Metro system. Then, on a Wednesday morning in the ever-crowded Chatalet Metro station, I watched as a young woman was pushed, pulled, and carried through, up, and out of the station by what appeared to be her father and brother, all while she sat in a wheelchair only periodically able to operate the wheels herself.

From a distance, trying to remain inconspicuous, I followed. I watched as they made their way through areas that had only stairs. Some areas had escalators, but they only went in one direction so to cater to work commuters during the busiest travel times. I looked left. I looked right. I looked all around. No elevators were available. At the top of the last set of stairs that opened out to a bustling boulevard full of tourists and...
Parisians, alike, I started to explore, like I do every time I go to Paris. Only this time I felt different. No future trip to Paris, or anywhere else for that matter, would be the same.

As an Associate Professor in Recreational Therapy, for the past 16 years I have taught an Inclusive Recreation Services course to undergraduate students at Florida International University (FIU), a large public institution located in Miami, FL. This course includes a cursory overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a law signed into act in the United States in 1990. Students enrolled in this course participate in a variety of learning activities designed to help challenge their attitudes about disability and develop a better understanding of the challenges people with disabilities confront when accessing transportation and recreation opportunities. At the core of the course is the idea that every person, regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, or disability should be afforded fully inclusive opportunities so to fully engage in all facets of life. A semester has never ended without at least a few students stating that the course was the most “eye-opening” course they have taken. It is not unusual to receive calls from graduates of FIU who have been instrumental in making structural or programmatic changes in their work places because of what they had learned in the course. Little did I know how disability-related learning experiences could be so much more profound, even life changing.

Not being able to get the image of the family helping the young lady navigate the Paris Metro system, I wanted students to be able to experience what I took for granted; I wanted students to feel what I did at that moment when I started to think about travel differently. It had never occurred to me that I could take them to Paris, but I knew that I wanted to make it happen. I called the study abroad office.

One year later I was in Europe with 11 able-bodied college students in tow. Some students needed the course to satisfy their degree requirements and thought that enrolling in a section planned as a study abroad course would be interesting. Other students wanted only to go to Italy and/or France and this course appeared to be the right way to get to do that. Everyone, including me, left taken aback by how much more we learned than what we had anticipated. This article provides a description of learning activities and events that led the students, as well as myself, to be more cognizant of the challenges people with disabilities confront while traveling and, perhaps, become more inclined to consider ways we can all help increase opportunities for inclusion.

Miami, FL

The Inclusive Recreation Services course is traditionally offered over the course of a 15-week semester. For the purpose of the study abroad version of the course, the first 2 weeks were spent on campus in Miami, FL. During this time, students attended lectures on topics such as societal and personal attitudes toward people with disabilities, sensitive terminology, the ADA, universal design, and disabling conditions. Students completed accessibility surveys of various recreation areas on campus and participated in one wheelchair simulation activity. In addition, students were provided with basic information related to travel and disability specific to the United States, as well as for Italy and France, as a way of providing them with information and resources that they could use when participating in assignments while abroad.

Florence, Italy

After 2 weeks of on-campus class meetings, we met in the afternoon of May 19, 2014, in the lobby of the Hotel Albergo in Florence, Italy. Our first class meeting was not scheduled until the next morning, so we set out on a tour of the city provided by Marco, a local tour guide who was prepared to challenge the class with questions about art, history, and architecture. As interested as everyone was in learning what Marco had to share, unbeknownst to Marco, and perhaps in a disappointing way, this class was not composed of students studying art and/or history. Marco appeared perplexed when many of the students spent more time looking for ramps than learning what year Michaelangelo sculpted the Statue of David. As we made our way through crowds of people, we gazed at
the sites, repeatedly tripped while walking on uneven cobblestone streets, climbed steep, narrow stairwells where elevators were unavailable, and easily climbed on to benches to enjoy views of the city from the top floor of a church. Later, we all sat (or stood) for dinner in one of the many small and crowded restaurants. It was new. It was exciting. Moreover, it was simple.

Breakfast was over and a tired group of students met me at the steps of Loggia Dei Lanzi located on the edge of the Piazza Della Signoria where we discussed the Italian disability laws before separating into groups to complete assignments for a discussion that would occur at a different location—the Basilica Santa Croce.

Disability laws: Italy

Not long after the ADA became a law in the United States, the Italian Parliament incorporated previous legal provisions into the first law in Italy enacted to assist people with disabilities in the areas of employment, public services, and transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications. Students were separated into groups so that they could explore the various areas within the law, in addition to researching education, inclusion, and “Accessible Italy,” an organization who provides tourism services for people with disabilities.

Later that day the class reconvened to discuss what they learned from their research. One group talked about how the Italian law requires that a certain percentage of employees in public and private settings must have a disability. They also noted that the law reads that if a crime is committed against a person with a disability, the person who committed the crime might face a sentence that is one-third to one-half higher than if the crime was not committed against a person with a disability. Another group discussed how new construction projects are overseen by the Minister of Public Works so that architectural barriers are eliminated. This same group shared with the class how the law requires that all public and private facilities, including schools and buildings used for social interests, must be made accessible. In the event that the building or site has historic, artistic, or cultural significance, then access can be provided through provisional accommodations. In other words, everyone may be able to enter the building, but not necessarily access all parts of the building. Information gathered was deemed enlightening by the class. The law is in place and changes have been made or in process. It was now time to experience Florence, Italy, from a perspective similar to that of people with physical limitations or disabilities.

“That’s stupid. They should have taken the bus.”

We completed a brief overview of Italy’s disability law and were now on our way up to Piazzale Michelangelo, a plaza that offers panoramic views of the city from a high elevation, and Basilica San Miniato al Monte, a church that was built between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries and is located above the Piazzalle. There are two commonly used options for reaching both sites, by ground transportation or by foot. Taking taxis or a bus would seem like the logical choice, as four of the students were using wheelchairs. However, this option would have meant that views that can be experienced by taking the pathway would be missed. At 10:00 AM, we set out from the hotel to the Piazzalle, an ordinarily estimated 26-minute walk from the Hotel Albergo.

Despite having been given tips on how to find needed information, instead of researching ideas for how to best to get there, the students opted to look at the map and choose the shortest distance between the two locations. This route took us through the heavily traveled area outside the Uffizi Gallery. Once we reached the end of the plaza, after warding off numerous peddlers, the students had to decide whether to lift each student in a wheelchair up and over a stoop or return back through the crowds to access the ramp located near where we began. It was early and they were energetic; they lifted the wheelchairs and we were on our way down the walkway of the Arno river.

After passing a tour group of school-aged children, many of whom stopped to stare at the students in wheelchairs, we made our way across the Arno, through and across streets, and up steep, narrow sidewalks to the bottom of the entrance to the path that
ends well below the entrance of the Piazzalle. The path is steep and includes 441 tree-lined steps. Directly to the right of the stairs is what appears an even path. As the student considered attempting to use the path, a gentleman coming down the stairs took note of the group’s composition and informed us that the even part of the path stops about halfway up, something they would have known had they completed the requisite research. The class then decided to take the road just to the right.

The paved road includes several twists and turns that must be taken to reach the road with sidewalks that is closest to the Basilica. After taking a few of the turns, we came upon our first view of the city from across right side of the river. The seven students who were not using wheelchairs immediately jumped over a curb and ran to the edge to take pictures before turning around and noticing that four of their classmates were unable to take in the same view. Taking note, they quickly ran back and grabbed cameras from those students who were in wheelchairs so that they could take pictures for them. In their excitement, and with good intentions, they did not think to assist their classmates so that they, too, could enjoy the view. This was the first and last time this occurred.

After completing what was arguably an arduous journey, we arrived at the entrance of Basilica San Miniato al Monte. This time, however, the views from outside the Basilica were easily visible to all. After spending some time outside, the class wanted to go inside. Noticing that some of the students were using wheelchairs, a gentleman hurriedly located a ramp and extended it for the class. From outside, I watched everyone enter the Basilica. After waiting approximately 5 minutes, I entered the Basilica to find the entire class sitting quietly together on the ground level. When I asked them why they were not exploring, they informed me that this was the only area the entire class could enjoy together. This time, they decided it would be better to remain a group than to have only part of the group afforded the opportunity to see everything. The first truly empathetic moment had occurred.

We left the Basilica and headed toward the Piazalle. En route, a woman told us that the remainder of the path did not include stairs and that we did not need to go back on to the road. Her advice was accurate up until we arrived at a small set of stairs that needed to be taken down to finish our trip to where the Piazalle is located. Again, the students opted to help one another rather than return up the path and then down to the road to get to the Pizzale. One by one, each student using a wheelchair was carefully turned around and lowered down the stairs. It seemed as though the last barrier had been overcome. Or, so we thought. To get to the edge of the Piazzale, where the views can be seen, and coin operated binoculars are positioned at approximately 5 ft above the ground, we had to traverse a busy, curved street that did not include traffic signs or lights. Traffic was slow paced, so we opted to stop traffic ourselves to be able to make our way across the street. We made our way to the edge of the Piazzalle by 1:00 PM, 3 hours after we left the hotel.

Before making it as far as the street, however, a man passing by commented loud enough to be heard, that it was “stupid” for them to not have taken the bus. This made them angry, even defensive, but it gave them pause. They agreed that perhaps we should have accessed a form of transportation, and how exhausting it was to travel without transportation. They then considered what would have been missed if they had not done so and concluded that it was more important that everyone had traveled together, and enjoyed all the views and sites, than to have settled for a limited experience. They woefully pondered how that option would not be realistic for everyone, regardless of whether a person has a disability, considering the challenges they (the class) had to overcome to complete the trip. Moreover, they wondered how things could be changed so that the experience can be made equal and easily accessible to all.

Accessibility assignment

Prior to leaving Miami, students completed an accessibility assignment on the FIU campus that required them to take measurements and complete a checklist for a recreation area. In Florence, they were assigned to small groups and asked to use the same
checklist to review accessibility for the following sites: Museo di Palazzo Vecchio (a museum and the town hall for Florence), Santa Maria Novella train station, and the Cathedrale Santa Maria Del Fiore, otherwise referred to as the Duomo. In addition to assessing sites for people with physical disabilities, each group was required to consider sensory and cognitive limitations, as well. In all, the groups found that, with the exception of the train station, disability parking spaces were limited or nonexistent. All areas were accessible from the outside; slanted walkways and ramps were available. However, once they entered sites, little else was easily accessed. For example, if a person chooses to go to the top of the Duomo, that person would have no choice but to climb the stairs because no elevators are provided. Students discussed at length the challenges of providing assistance to a person who is deaf or who has a visual impairment, and what adaptations or modifications would be necessary in assuring a fully inclusive experience. Numerous other situations were considered, not the least of which is how historical information about sites can be written and/or explained to a person with an intellectual disability. Discussions were wide ranging and all relevant when considering how to improve accessibility in any situation.

Paris, France

After we completed eight nights in Florence, Italy, we boarded a train for Paris, France, where the class would participate in another wheelchair assignment, spend a day participating in an activity designed to help them learn to consider how they would modify an art-related travel experience for people with visual impairments or who are blind, and learn about how to access public transportation.

“Non vouchers! En espèces seulement!”

The scheduled 8-hour train ride from Milan to Paris took close to 10 hours to complete, leaving us at our arrival station too late to take a city train to the Terminus Hotel Orleans. Because of the delay we were granted several vouchers for taxis. On arrival to the hotel, however, the taxi drivers refused to accept the vouchers while holding the students’ luggage hostage. The matter escalated but was eventually resolved by the hotel desk clerk and by 3:00 AM we were checked in to the hotel. The Paris tour started promptly 7 hours later. Like in Florence, everything was new and exciting. The difference was that now students were exhausted and therefore slightly less curious about the upcoming challenges.

The late start caused a chain reaction of delays, so we had little time to discuss disability laws before beginning the first assignment, an assignment that would involve getting all 11 students, four of whom would be using wheelchairs, from our hotel located on the far left bank of the Seine river to the steps of the Basilica of the Sacré Cœur located on a hill on the right bank of the river. Thinking the obstacles could not be as challenging as those they encountered in Florence, the students assumed that they would simply use the Paris Metro and then help one another the rest of the way up. They soon learned otherwise.

The Paris Metro

The Paris Métropolitain, more often referred to as the Paris Metro, is an under- and above ground transit system that serves the Paris Metropolitan area. Influenced by Art Nouveau and known for its uniform architecture, the Paris Metro is 133 miles long with 16 lines and 62 transfers. Today, it is one of the busiest Metro systems in Europe with 1.5 billion people accessing it each year. To access the Paris Metro, one might climb down several levels of stairwells and follow a maze of hallways to areas well below the city. Many travelers find the Metro to be full of mystique and intrigue. Franz Kafka once wrote that, “The Metro furnishes the best opportunity for the foreigner to imagine that he has understood, quickly and correctly, the essence of Paris.” But, not everyone sees the Paris Metro as intriguing. In response to the many complaints users have made over the years, authorities released a manual that includes 12 tongue-in-cheek rules of Metro etiquette. For example, authorities ask that users to “. . .help to the person standing there in Bermuda shorts holding a Metro map in one hand and his head...
in the other.” Humor might help to get some riders to read the rules, and perhaps even consider following them, but what the rules of etiquette do not address are the challenges people with disabilities confront when trying to use the system.

The Paris Metro opened in 1900 in During the World's Fair (Exposition Universelle) a time when accessibility was not considered. Lines were added and more and more people were crowding into it. It was not until 1982 that a disability-related law was passed that addressed public transportation issues. The initial steps taken in Paris included adding accessible bus routes. Although progress has since been made, budgetary, technical, and administrative obstacles remain. Administrative obstacles include a lack of cooperation among authorities and organizations involved as well the fact that the system was designed at a time that preceded a priority being given to accessibility. It is known that the process of modifying such a comprehensive system will take a long time. In the meantime, we [the class] learned firsthand the challenges of navigating a system in the present that will likely require several years of architectural modifications.

“You have a problem -- No! You can't eat here!”

It was a crisp, cool morning. The sun was out and the Metro stop by our hotel was no more than 18 m outside the front door. I had given them some tips the evening before and suggested that they use the evening to prepare. The students looked around at the wide, flat sidewalks and assumed that the wheelchair assignment in Paris would be considerably easier than in Florence. They smiled at one another as they headed to one of the two elevators located on each side of the street where entrances to the Porte Orleans Metro stop are located. They pressed the button for the first elevator before looking at the sign written in French indicating that it was not in operation. We crossed the street to the other elevator, but found the same sign. We called from the phone located on the side of the elevator and were promptly hung up on. We remained in that location for the next 30 minutes as the students discussed and then decided on an alternative route. It was apparent that they had not used the information provided to them the evening before to prepare for the day's assignment.

Some students stood or sat quietly, while others studied the Metro and bus maps. Together they decided that they were going to take Bus 80 from a stop that is located approximately 1 mile from the hotel. On the map, it appeared as though they simply needed to travel a paved sidewalk. As it turned out several of sidewalks had to be shared with many pedestrians meandering through a large outdoor market. It took close to an hour to get to the bus stop. We waited approximately 10 minutes for the bus to arrive. A collective sigh of relief could be heard as the driver pulled up to the stop. As he opened the door, I informed him that we had four people using wheelchairs and asked if he would lower the ramp. He said that he would not and attempted to close the doors on us. Despite his protest, while two students propped the center doors open, two other students lifted one chair at a time onto the bus. To the dismay of the driver, we were finally on our way to the Basilica of the Sacré Cœur.

Uncomfortably situated in a small section of the middle of the bus, the students riding in the wheelchairs quickly found that their view was limited. One student kept her head down throughout most of the journey, only to explain later that it was to block the smell of urine that emanated from that corner. She had no other option but to remain in that corner. We passed by Les Invalides, the Eiffel Tower, and other sites we had not yet visited. Those students who were standing enjoyed clear views of the sites; those who could not sat quietly. Once we reached the bus stop located closest to our destination, we descended off the bus and began the challenging journey up the narrow, steep walkways of Montmartre before reaching the funicular that would take us to the Basilica of the Sacré Cœur. In all, it took 3 hours at arrive to our destination. There was little excitement. Those who were not seated in wheelchairs did not want to experience views the other students could not experience. Everyone stayed close together and quickly decided to forgo exploring and instead take a break for lunch.

The logical place to eat lunch was located approximately 20 steps below the exit area at the top of the
Two students asked an employee where we would be able to go to get everyone in, only to be told, “You have a problem -- No! You can’t eat here!” Exhausted and discouraged, we boarded the funicular and made our way back down the hill and into the first restaurant that would seat the entire group. We ate in relative silence before looking for an accessible restroom and beginning the trip back to the hotel.

We sat at the bus stop for approximately 15 minutes. People looked at the students in wheelchairs. Some people looked as though they felt bad for them. Others appeared indifferent. Discouraged and tired, the class, too, looked indifferent, just as events were to take a turn for the better. We were taking the same bus route back to the hotel that we took to get to Montmartre. However, when the bus pulled up to the curb, a different bus driver emerged from the bus, lowered the ramp, and assisted everyone on to the bus. Everyone smiled and cheered. The bus would get more and more crowded with each stop. Only, this time they felt a sense of hope. They considered how much better their experience was because of one person who performed two simple tasks: lowering of a ramp by pushing a button, and helping them get on the bus.

“This is not good. I’m going to die today.”

Paris is a city in which many great works of art can be found throughout famous museums, such as the Louvre Museum or the Musee D’Orsay. Paris is also the capital of France. Before the French Revolution, the Château de Versailles, located on the western edge of Paris, served as the seat of government from 1682 until 1789. It is a city that once governed through a monarchy. Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Louis XVI all resided at, and governed from, the Château de Versailles. The Château, that has long since been open to visitors, has 700 rooms and can hold up to 20,000 people. It would be the ideal location to experience art from the standpoint of a person with a visual impairment or who is blind.

At promptly 10:00 AM, we set out for the Château Versailles by way of the Réseau Express Régional (RER). Five students began the trip blindfolded and remained so for the next 3 hours. Over the course of the first 30 minutes that it took to get everyone in to the metro station and onto a train, the only sounds heard from the students were their voices giving explicit directions to one another. Once on the train, they mostly sat quietly. Those who were wearing blindfolds sat with their faces pointing forward, perhaps occasionally dozing off.

Deciding which students to put into pairs was partly random and partly strategic. Traveling with college students provides a vantage point not always easily noticeable to the students. As much as they tried to conceal from me who was arguing, who felt slighted by a classmate, or who might have felt left out the night before, changes in behavior were noticeable. On this morning, it was clear that two students were keeping distance from one another. Pairing them up would leave them no choice but to work together to assure a safe and rewarding experience. One of the two students who was intentionally paired with another student, later jokingly told me that she thought for certain that she “...would be blindfolded for her last minutes on earth.” She not only lived, she, along with her classmates, experienced firsthand the challenges people with visual impairments or who are blind experience when accessing public transportation and visiting a crowded attraction. It takes time, patience, and a willingness to quickly and thoughtfully choose words to describe what is visible to the student assisting the student who is blindfolded. This proved true not only in navigating the Metro system, but in helping to explain the Château grounds and buildings, what lunch choices were available in the museum cafeteria, and how certain pieces of art appear to the person who is sighted feel, as well. For those who were blindfolded, it required being able to relinquish some control and trust a classmate. The assignment proved educational and emotionally challenging to all. As Sadler described:

“Traveling through the subway system blindfolded was very terrifying for me. Not knowing how high a step is or how large the gap is between the train and the platform is very frightening without a cane. Sense of control must be shifted to someone
else. Trusting the sighted guide takes courage on the part of the person who is blind. In addition, a sighted person can miss out on the tourism experience when describing a piece of artwork to someone with a visual impairment. The sighted guide must always be alert and aware of their surroundings when in a museum, such as the Palace of Versailles in Paris.  

*Using the social model of disability to guide simulations*

Simulations can have both beneficial and negative consequences, depending on how they are conducted and the outcomes sought as a result of the simulations. Simulations are intended to increase empathy toward people with disabilities and give participants short-lived opportunities to experience what it would be like to accomplish tasks while in a contrived situation such as being in a wheelchair or wearing a blindfold. Sometimes, however, rather than developing positive insights, students might experience negative emotions such as frustration and anger. A poorly constructed simulation experience might also result in students judging people with disabilities as less capable of living independently. To plan for effective experiences during this course, sites were preselected, outcomes were set, and discussions about what we hoped to accomplish and why we were participating in the activities, occurred. Borrowing from Karraker, debriefing was extensive and included discussions about thoughts, values, norms, and social change after each simulation activity. To do this, the Social Model of Disability was applied so that the focus moved away from disability as a private experience to one that allowed the students to examine their own social biases and stereotypes. Seeing attitudes directed toward them, as with what occurred with the bus driver in Paris, “...however briefly, enabled some participants to see interaction of enabling or foreclosing opportunities for full participation.”

*Attitudinal or architectural differences, or both?*

Learning to describe the idea for the study abroad course to friends and colleagues who live in Paris in a manner that did not offend them proved to be difficult. In discussing possibilities with a faculty member from the University of Paris, for example, I was reminded that the New York subway system also presents challenges to people with disabilities. I responded to her the same way I do to everyone with whom I have discussed, and continue to discuss, the idea; that is, that the United States is far from perfect. The difference is that United States is a young nation in comparison to Italy and France, with many newly and relatively newly constructed buildings, most of which were built after electricity became standard, thus making modifications less difficult to complete. Furthermore, with the passage of the ADA, to be in compliance with the law, public accommodations and commercial facilities now had to be designed, constructed, and altered in compliance with the accessibility standards. However, the passage of the ADA did not mean that every opportunity was going to be made immediately accessible to all. The ADA provides the minimum standards necessary for sites and programs to be in compliance. However, meeting the letter of the law does not mean the spirit of the law has been met. For example, a restroom might include an automatic door and appropriate signage, but still remain difficult to navigate if one is in a wheelchair. In other words, a site or program within the United States might be designed to meet the requirements of the law but still be inconvenient for many people with disabilities, regardless of when buildings were constructed.

In addition to the need for all people to consider the spirit of the law, it is important to recognize that the ADA is a complaint driven law. A means for inspecting whether the law has been upheld does not exist. Although some investigations are initiated by the US Department of Justice, most complaints originate “...from people with disabilities, their families or disability-rights organizations.” This citizen-centered approach, both within the United States and internationally, potentially serves as a model for improving accessibility and increasing inclusive recreation opportunities throughout the world.

Furthermore, when considering that this course also involves exploring individual attitudes toward
people with disabilities, the idea was to help students to develop their ability to identify their own attitudes, as well as cultivate an ability to be introspective. People with disabilities not only must contend with the challenges of trying to master tasks that are difficult as a result of their disabilities but also must learn to overcome a larger barrier, that of societal negative attitudes.\textsuperscript{18} The degree to which people with disabilities might have to contend with negative attitudes might vary across cultures; however, no society is without them. Simple exposure to a person with a physical disability has the potential to provoke a fear of death, thus providing one explanation for why some people react negatively.\textsuperscript{19} Dovidio et al.\textsuperscript{20} refer to this as an indirect threat and suggest that seeing someone with a physical disability can “...simply remind people of their vulnerability and mortality,” thus contributing to stigmatization of people with disabilities.

Closing Comments

This article provides a mere sampling of the activities in which students participated and the content knowledge attained through traditional on-campus academic activities that occurred before going abroad. Ideas for adapting structured recreation activities and experiences for people of different ages and genders, as well as various physical, mental, sensory, and cognitive limitations and disabilities, were examined and discussed relative to the assignments completed on campus and abroad. The ADA was used abroad as a means for comparing differences in how accessibility and inclusion are addressed internationally.

In addition to discussing specifics related to the course topics and content, time was dedicated to examining attitudes and emotions. For example, as Torres explained at the end of the class:

“...What I have learned goes beyond a moment of empathy. It has led me to what I believe is the next step. This includes advocating for services. Advocacy is crucial in including people with disabilities as participating members of our society. It all begins by becoming an informed individual. I have found that many of the people who say negative or insensitive comments about people with disabilities are the ones who are lacking knowledge about them. It could be due to limited or lack of exposure.”\textsuperscript{21}

Angel described her experience this way:

“Looking back on this class, I would have never thought I would have left with such a life changing experience. Before leaving to Europe, we went over the terms and basic concepts of the ADA. However, actually living it gave me such a learning experience that a book or class could have never given me. Being in a wheelchair or pretending to be blind would never come close to actually having a disability, but it gave me a perspective that I wouldn't have otherwise. This class taught me how to look past disabilities and see the person for who they are. It taught it me that no matter what the circumstances any activity can be modified so that everyone can enjoy it. Planning and patience are keys in activity planning for people with disabilities. The biggest lesson I will walk away with is that there is so much more we can do as a community to include people with disabilities in society around the world.”\textsuperscript{22}

The learning was far from limited to the students. I, too, at times felt overwhelmed with how much there is to still experience and understand. I left teeming with ideas for future classes and potential research-related projects. Moreover, I left feeling certain that the students took away lessons learned from the class and will be using them to positively influence others and effect change. Perhaps these soon to be graduates of FIU will someday serve as catalysts for change not only in the United States but also internationally. As Monica Cummings stated:

“This trip allowed me to examine personal, societal, and global attitudes towards people with disabilities. It added clarity to my understanding of how leisure and disability transcends cul-
Not long after returning to the United States, BBC News Trending posted a story titled, “I’m single because of the bus,” that featured a story about Iacopo Melio’s challenges with accessing public transportation in Italy. In an effort to bring attention to the difficulties he encounters when trying to use the bus or train, he started asking people from around the world to post pictures of themselves holding a sign that reads, “#vorreiprendereilreno” which translates into, “I would like to take the train.” As Melio says, “This is not my battle, but a battle for everyone.” Perhaps, ultimately, every student in this class will learn from lessons learned and mistakes made throughout the course and be instrumental in helping Iacopo Melio, and other people with disabilities, to be able to take the train, and find the world a more accessible place for all.

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