

Preface

When I first took students to Japan in 2016, it was an eye-opening experience for me. Since I had never chaperoned a large group of people anywhere, I had not realized how many different hats I would need to wear during the 4-week program. Also, I had no idea how fulfilling the entire experience would eventually become both for my students and me alike. Even though it was fulfilling, there seemed to be a constant rush to the next deadline with not much time to reflect in between the programs. After taking students abroad for three consecutive years, I felt the need to pause and reflect on the program. Then COVID-19 happened...and the program had to be halted temporarily due to travel restrictions. Around that time, I saw a publication from our university's Office of International Affairs highlighting some of the faculty-led study abroad programs at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). I was fascinated to see the variety of programs offered across various academic colleges. While flipping through the pages, I was thinking about a common thread that could tie those programs together, and that is when the thought of intercultural competence dawned.

As research has shown, intercultural and global competencies are relevant to all fields regardless of discipline. Hence started the journey of this book project. After my co-editor Seok Jeng Jane Lim agreed to come on board, there was no looking back. I am forever grateful to Jane not only for being an outstanding collaborator but also for her warm friendship and generosity. Jane and I often joke, but it is true that we could not have completed this project without each other. I am also extremely indebted to all our chapter authors for their excellent

contributions and for being highly professional and respectful of our requirements. For me, this was a writing project that I truly enjoyed from start to finish.

—Priya Ananth, co-editor

You often hear the saying it takes a village to raise a child; likewise, in this situation, it took a whole village of study abroad advocates to complete this book. When I read the call for chapter contributions for this book in fall 2021, I knew that I wanted to be a part of this book. Having led four study abroad trips to Singapore since 2013, I was excited to share what I know and what the students have gained because of being a part of study abroad. When Priya asked to meet in spring 2022 on a beautiful afternoon to further discuss the book, I had no idea she wanted me to be her co-editor for the book. I was truly honored and humbled by this invitation, and what an amazing journey it has been.

From our initial conversation that spring afternoon, we decided the contributing authors need to have a clear vision of this book. We wanted the authors not only to share their expertise but at the same time grow in the process and unite in this common vision of advocating for intercultural competencies in study abroad. First, we started with a Zoom meeting for interested authors who wanted to contribute, in which we presented the chapter template and timeline. Second, we had a writing day with lunch provided for contributing authors in summer 2022 to help them kickstart their chapter writing, feeding both soul and brain. Third, Priya and I met weekly to plan, coordinate, and write. We also invited any contributing authors to contact us via phone, Zoom, or email regarding any questions they had in the process. Finally, we had an

arduous journey of reviewing each chapter numerous times, sending it back and forth to the authors before sending it out to external reviewers and the publisher for further review. This book is indeed a labor of love as each contributing author went above and beyond to give their best.

Of course, I could never imagine myself being a part of this amazing journey without Priya Ananth. I have known her since 2013 when I planned my first study abroad to Singapore, but it was only through the collaboration of this book that we affirmed and grew our friendship. Our weekly meetings became a time for emotional support in our ups and downs as we experienced health issues, work stress, and even death in our families. Priya was a solid rock throughout the whole process, and I am so thankful for having a friend like her.

As you embark on reading this book, we want to invite you to come alongside us as a friend, traveling the world through the book and starting your own journey of encouraging intercultural engagement in your course, class, and institution. We would love to hear about your journey and process, so please write to and share your story with us.

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—Seok Jeng Jane Lim, co-editor

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