A brighter and more interculturally connected future

The ILP Mission: To prepare global leaders for a progressively interconnected future, to ennoble the values of cross-cultural competence, and to equip aspiring leaders with the skills they need to succeed.
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The ISSS cohort project

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The Intercultural Leadership Program is no ordinary leadership program. Its agenda spans beyond the very broad realm of leadership specifically to contexts in which leadership must consider the implications of intercultural engagement. With this focus the program aims not only to equip participants with the skills necessary for future leadership roles but aims specifically to forge intercultural leaders for a more interculturally connected future. Furthermore, the program seeks to promote cross-cultural awareness, foregrounding the very present reality of professional and non-professional contexts characterized by an interplay of ethnic, racial, gender, national, and cultural diversities. For some, the concept of leadership and matters of interculturalism seem distant and perhaps unrelated. But ILP founder Rudie Altamirano wanted to respond to the growing need for interculturally competent leaders who are equipped to operate in contexts that bring diverse individuals together. By compounding these two terms the program acknowledges the potential of intercultural collaborations while recognizing the importance of a particular skill set for leaders in intercultural contexts. With this agenda in mind, the program brings together incoming graduate and undergraduate, domestic and international students from across Penn’s 4 undergraduate schools, 12 graduate schools, and myriad teaching hospitals and research centers to unpack intercultural leadership.

Through a number of engaging and interactive workshops, participants are challenged to draw from prior experience to explore various concepts such as multiculturalism, micro aggression and a plethora of related concepts. For many of the participants, the ILP program is the first investigation of such concepts, and with the guidance of the intellectual contributions from staff and from their fellow aspiring intercultural leaders, they come away with invaluable insight into the inner workings of intercultural leadership and the challenges of assuming leadership roles in intercultural contexts.

The orchestrated assembly of the participating mature and inquisitive minds creates a safe space in which sensitive topics can be addressed in response to questions around how effective leadership can resolve issues directly and indirectly related with diversity and collaboration. The rich dialogue that comes from these questions leads to further questions, which adds complexity the concept of intercultural leadership. As a result, participants develop a greater appreciation for intercultural leadership.

Participants explore real world examples of ineffective leadership as well as examples of the absence of intercultural leadership, evaluating the courses of action/inaction in order to consider strategies for appropriate action. Expanding on these exercises, participants design and execute a semester-long project integrating the concepts discussed throughout the program to engage the greater UPenn community. Beyond just the academic side of ILP, the program also serves as a hub for global-minded individuals who wish to develop ties within the growing network of intercultural leaders.

“We are paving the way for future global leaders.”

“I feel that as not just the country but as the world becomes more connected I feel like we really need to learn not just how to lead each other but also how to respect each other... so adding the intercultural part to leadership and actually interacting with diverse people helps.”
RETREAT WEEKEND
Fostering an intercultural community

The ILP retreat kicked off with an evening of introductions, games, and goal-setting on Friday, September 18th. The 2015 ILP cohort met at the CAPS office and enjoyed an intimate dinner, ice-breakers, and a session to help set the vision for the weekend. “One of the highlights of the program from the very beginning was meeting all the different people from all over, different countries... there was a cool mix of undergraduate and graduate students all in the same program.” (participant feedback)

Participants returned Saturday morning to kick off the retreat with breakfast at the International House. Throughout the morning, the ILP cohort participated in a series of leadership games and group challenges as they navigated questions about what makes someone a leader and how to navigate those moments when your group is depending on you.

The afternoon continued with more sessions that explicitly considered the notion of “intercultural leadership.” With participants from a diverse range of countries, the conversations were rich with examples of cultural and personal experiences that deepened understanding and raised important questions. In particular, participants grappled with ideas about communicating across cultural lines and navigating positions of dominance in new cultural contexts. “Intercultural leadership is all about learning to appreciate other peoples cultures while also learning to share your own.” (participant feedback) In a lot of ways, the conversations allowed participants to develop new goals for themselves as “intercultural leaders” on campus. The first full day of the retreat ended with a set of skits that highlighted key ideas from the day, and the group left the International House that evening after a night of laughing and learning.

The final day of the retreat was a highlight for many participants. In these sessions, the cohort took a deeper, harder look at leadership in challenging times. Finally, participants broke into groups to begin planning their involvement as leaders in planning long-term group projects. The goal of the projects is to increase awareness of and participation in intercultural leadership across campus. In partnering with several organizations across campus, the ILP cohort had a chance to really dig into intercultural leadership right here at Penn. Overall, the group left on Sunday with new insight about leadership and renewed energy and enthusiasm about the future not only for the ILP group but also for the Penn community.
Introducing Director Rudie Altimirano

Rudie Altimirano is the Director of Penn Global’s International Student and Scholar Services. He has considerable experience in cross-cultural programming and expertise. He provides overall leadership in determining and implementing organizational and campus-wide strategies for ISSS including the delivery of quality services and programs to international students, scholars, faculty, staff, and exchange visitors at Penn. Dr. Altimirano has held regional and national leadership positions in NAFSA: The Association for International Educators. He has presented and conducted more than 300 immigration, cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution workshops. He has presented and conducted more than 300 cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution workshops nationally and internationally. In 2007, in partnership with other Penn offices, he founded, conceptualized and spearheaded the Intercultural Leadership Program. Dr. Altimirano was also a trained/certified cross-cultural Conflict Mediator and has conducted more than 100 cross-cultural mediation cases involving international and domestic students and faculty. He has presented and conducted training in public organizations, private corporations, primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, non-profit organizations, government institutions, health services, and speakers’ bureau.

Drawing inspiration from the International Student and Scholar Services’ grand mission of global engagement, the ISSS cohort took on the task of serving as the intercultural scribes for the entirety of this year’s ILP cohort. Their mission: to document and relay the experiences and contributions of the ILP participants through a digital medium accessible to aspiring intercultural leaders and future ILP participants.

In collaborating with their fellow intercultural cohorts, the group witnessed the collaborative process of forging intercultural ties and inspiring projects that aimed at utilizing the skills and strategies discussed over the program. “It was really cool to see each of the cohort’s projects coming together. It was as if we ourselves were orchestrating the coming together of diverse cultures.” (ISSS cohort student leader). Each of the ISSS cohort members inherited the role of liaison between their assigned cohort and the ISSS cohort through which they would take part in the design process.

In so doing, the ISSS cohort enjoyed a very active role in each of the projects which better equipped them to capture the intercultural experience. Having establish themselves as members of the varying cohort teams, they were also able to sit with many of the participants and document their journeys as developing intercultural leaders. “I was really surprised at how well the program brought diverse people together. The program helped me become aware of what intercultural leadership is and to work on the intercultural leader I want to be… I aspire to be the type of leader that can help others to see the benefit of collaboration [across] cultures.” (ILP participant).

Beyond their collaborations the ISSS cohort members came together amongst themselves to create ILP’s first magazine. The magazine compiles the great work of all the ILP participants in a familiar format accessible to a broader audience. “Intercultural leadership is all about collaborating and coordinating with diverse individuals” (ILP participant). The ISSS cohort project epitomizes this definition.
The Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is the counseling center at University of Pennsylvania where students seek out psychological support as they adjust to life at Penn. This service is particularly helpful for persons from different cultural backgrounds who have come to the United States for the first time. Students learn to manage personal psychological situational and developmental challenges.

CAPS staff is comprised of psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers of diverse backgrounds who specialize in working with university students. Some of the options available are: Individual Counseling, Group Counseling, Psychiatric Services, Referral Services and Workshops. Everything is confidential and personnel are legally and ethically bound to keep it this way.

The 2015 ILP-CAPS cohort’s main objective was to analyze mental health issues from a culturally diverse point of view. Different cultures look at mental health differently and have different levels of stigma associated with it. It might be seen as demeaning to go to counseling and get help. This project aims at gathering information from students of different cultural and geographical backgrounds via interviews and an online survey, focusing mainly on how stressed the person was on a regular day at Penn and how many of them had approached CAPS for advice.

The survey revealed that a surprisingly large amount of people had not reached out to CAPS due to various reasons such as not having enough knowledge about CAPS or feeling ashamed to talk to a counselor. Other parts of the survey and interview investigated how mental health issues are looked at in different parts of the world. The cohort hopes to get more people to be open about mental health issues by organizing events to spread awareness.

The OSA cohort determined that they wanted to interview and talk to clubs on campus that have successfully integrated cultural diversity into their organization to find out what works or not in terms of embracing diversity in tightly-knit clubs. By compiling these interviews together, the OSA Cohort would produce a video that serves as a resource for other clubs on-campus that would like help in becoming more culturally diverse. In essence, the OSA Cohort would function similar to a high-value consulting firm in their service to the student organizations at Penn.

Before their meeting, they had obtained an enormous excel sheet from the Office of Student Affairs listing all of the active campus student organizations at Penn. Their homework assignment: sifting through the 500+ listings, select potentially interesting groups, and conduct an interview with interested group leaders and/or members. The two members who did not conduct interviews—Jill and Juli—worked to compile and edit the final video. It was a game of divide and conquer.
The Graduate Student Center was established in 2001 to meet the unique needs of graduate and professional students at Penn. Situated on Locust Walk, the Graduate Student Center provides graduate and professional students with a centrally-located home. The Grad Center creates intellectual, social, and professional development programs to bring together the wide range of graduate and professional students at Penn for cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural exchanges. GSC makes it its mission to offer a wide range of resources designed to support these many dimensions of their wellness. In the 14 years since opening, the Grad Center has organized programs and events designed to enhance the grad community at Penn. From academic programs to language chats, from wine tours to sports broadcasts, the Grad Center has something for any student.

In order to embody the skills of intercultural leadership and commitment acquired during the ILP retreat weekend, the GSC Cohort went on and devised and executed the Intercultural Buddies Program as their final cohort project. The Intercultural Buddies Program matches graduate students with other graduate students who share cultural interests as a way to promote intercultural awareness and to enhance the integration among different student groups. The Program facilitates opportunities to meet, have fun and get to know each other over bi-weekly meetings and outings.

The Greenfield Intercultural Center (GIC) cohort in the Intercultural Leadership Program decided to tackle the barriers of interculturalism in a more individualistic way, exploring each individual person's interests and cultures. Instead of highlighting just their personal anecdotes from the ILP experience, strive to think of ways to apply the knowledge for academic and personal environment at Penn and beyond. Their project echoes patience, acceptance, and diversity, for it informs the audience both about the certain problematic multicultural issues and the prideful intercultural experiences; moreover, GIC delineates the two concepts in their presentation.

Rovel Sequeira, a graduate student in the GIC cohort, expands on the representation of Asian Americans in media. He questions media's intentions for entertainment because often times, media includes exaggerated stereotypes, the limited number of colored people, the usage of the token minority, and the multiple identities that are represented which compares traditional and modern descriptions. He explores the whether or not the Asian American identities have a multicultural aspect rather than intercultural. The cohort's main goal is to express issues and the prideful intercultural experiences; moreover, GIC delineates the two concepts in their presentation.

Sonali Dane, an undergraduate participant in the GIC cohort, explores the concepts of tradition and modernity in Indian culture. Presumptuous claims target ethnic cultures with only tags of stereotypes, traditional practices, and archaic accusations, devoid of experiential or informed statements. She reveals the importance of recognizing the existence of traditions and modernity, but also how it exists. The modern society pushes for social globalization, but Dane explores how certain groups of people can maintain traditions when acculturation is happening.

The GIC cohort also explores how people adjust to being immersed in a different culture, how they change to level with different cultures while maintaining traditions, and how, on the individual level, one would change. Especially in such a multicultural country, different American communities would face these issues. Immigrants or international citizens may face the repercussions of this struggle between two identities. The cohort's main goal is to provide confidence to level with different cultures, and provide intercultural education, which is providing confidence and leveled relatability between people that can foster progressive learning instead of fostering fear.

The GIC cohort engaged in conversation on the topic traditions and its influence on cultural identity at a weekly meeting. Valerie De Cruz, Director of GIC takes part in the discussion.
LEADERSHIP

Leading By Example

• Emily Newton (1) was an ILP participant last year and she is a second year graduate student in the Master of Environmental Studies program, concentrating in Environmental Sustainability and Energy Management. Prior to attending Penn, Emily worked for four years in management and marketing an energy technology start-up company. She also worked in marketing for a nonprofit research institution focused on research in environmental science. After graduation, Emily plans to work in corporate sustainability at an international organization so she can have a positive impact on its environmental footprint in developed and developing countries. In her free time, she loves to explore Philadelphia and see its landmarks, try new restaurants, and walk her dog, Remy, along the Schuylkill Running Trail.

• Manas Shukla (2) is in his 2nd year of Masters in Mechanical Engineering and is an international student from central region of India. His curiosity towards intercultural exchanges and interest in knowing people of different backgrounds allured him towards ILP last year and this year he will be the cohort leader with the Office of Students Affairs (OSA). Manas hopes to build a school and provide free education to underprivileged children as his long term goal and hopes to spread as much happiness in the world as he can. He is currently saving money to backpack in Tibet and China.

• Carl-Oscar Gustafson (3) is a sophomore from southern Sweden studying finance management at the Wharton School. Apart from his one year abroad at a boarding school in New York, Carl spent his whole life in Sweden. This summer he spent most of his time in Sweden working with the domestic services company he started 2 years ago. Because he aspires to one day become the leader of an international company, he is always looking for opportunities to learn about intercultural leadership. He is a Penn World Scholar, member of Phi Gamma Delta, and serves on the Wharton Communication Advisory Board. When he is not studying, he is most likely seen at the gym or riding his longboard around campus. Carl also enjoys singing and reading about social psychology.

• Vrinda Varia (4) is a second year student in the School of Policy and Practice, where she is pursuing a Master’s degree in Social Work. Her interest in the ILP program is directly related to her academic and professional goals. Vrinda hopes to pursue a career in higher education, working in student leadership development and community development. She hopes to eventually support the construction of institutional diversity policies. This year, Vrinda’s field placement is at the Greenfield Intercultural Center where she is excited to explore the nuances of Penn's community. She is also the Intercultural Fellow at the Graduate Student Center, where she supports programming around the themes of intercultural identities. In her free time, Vrinda can be found eating cheese, and watching TV.

• Kelly Sebetka (5) is a second-year master’s student at the School of Social Policy and Practice. Kelly grew up in rural Iowa and began exploring other cultures via her elementary school library. She earned a bachelor’s degree in English and international studies with minors in women’s and gender studies and psychology from Iowa State University, where she set a university record by studying abroad seven times. She then completed a year of service as an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer at a charter school in North Philly. Reflecting on her participation in these activities prompted Kelly to examine intercultural experiences through a lens of critical theory and social justice, which lead her to her current educational pursuit of macro-level social work. During ILP, Kelly aims to foster participants’ thinking about and engaging with local intercultural spaces, identities, and communities on and off Penn's campus.

• Fernando Gama (6) is currently in the second year of his Ph.D. studies in Electrical and Systems Engineering. He was a past participant of the ILP and enjoyed it so much he decided to help out this time. He comes from Buenos Aires, Argentina, and came to study in the US on a Fulbright Scholarship. His research interests are in Signal Processing and is currently working on new clustering methods as well as the emerging field of graph signal processing. While not doing research or taking courses he can be found passionately immersed in the world of football. He also loves rock music and plays the drums.

• Kia Marie Lor (7) is a second-year Intercultural Communication graduate student at Penn’s Graduate School of Education (GSE). In addition to being the ILP Cohort Leader, she is also the Intercultural Fellow for GSE’s Student Affairs and the Conference Volunteer Coordinator for the SIETAR-USA Conference. This summer she spent three weeks with the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication (SIIC) in Portland, Oregon as a SIIC Fellow. She also spent the summer backpacking through Laos, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Kia holds a BA in Communication & English from the College of St. Benedict in Minnesota, her home state. She is a proud Hmong-American woman working towards building cultural bridges across difference.

• Landion Donovan-Green (8) joined the the intercultural fellowship that is Penn in 2014 as a first year M.S.Ed specialization TESOL candidate. He has since advanced his position as a prospective educator by availing himself of the tutelage of faculty and staff at Penn and at Temple University as a co-facilitator of various English language teaching endeavors. His interests lie in autonomous language learning and language learning as border crossing. A past participant and current student leader of the ILP, Landon aspires to hone his linguistic and cultural repertoires toward developing as an ambassador for cross-cultural learning. Landon is currently the Student Center Coordinator for Penn’s English Language Program where he engages with international English as a Second Language (ESL).
Penn Global ISSS
Intercultural Leadership Program

University of Pennsylvania
International Students &
Scholars Services
3701 Chestnut Street Suite 1W
Philadelphia, PA 19104

To join the growing network of
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