

Gore, Joan Elias (2005). *Dominant Beliefs and Alternative Voices. Discourse, Belief, and Gender in American Study Abroad*. New York and London: Routledge. Pages: 268. Price: 75 USD (hardcover).

Reviewed by David Reyro, Professor, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

Joan Elias Gore addresses in this book the place of studies abroad in American higher education. In 2005, the Lincoln Commission established as a national goal the need to increase the number of American students completing part of their program abroad. Gore, using Michel Foucault's theories of the power of discourse, tries to explain the reasons for the limited interest of the institutions to motivate their students to study abroad. Foucault argued that institutions make up their self-image and the image of others through dominant discourses which are historically constructed. Following Foucault, Gore tries to explain the "genealogy" of the discourses of studying abroad from the perspective of American institutions of higher education.

The book is divided into four parts. Part one, "The Status of Study Abroad," contains one chapter, "The Marginal Role of Study Abroad in American Higher Education." It makes the case that although there is more interest than before among students in studying abroad and there is institutional support, the registration for these programs has grown very slowly. This chapter introduces the argument that will be developed later on in the book.

Part two, "Dominant Beliefs," examines the beliefs dominant in the institutional discourse regarding studying abroad. The first of these is the notion of studying abroad as a "Grand Tour" aimed at increasing cultural exposure but academically irrelevant. The second is the identification of studying abroad with activities typical of rich women with time on their hands; this prejudicial belief serves to undermine the notion of going to another place to study. The third belief is that most institutions abroad do not have high standards and the quality is inferior to domestic ones, in particular in relation to technical and professional subjects. Studies abroad are seen more suitable for the humanities (liberal arts) than for technical subjects. Foreign universities are not considered as having the same level as American ones in professional and technical careers.

Part three, "Alternative Voices," has two chapters. The first one, "Alternative Voices: Discourse and Belief among Faculty Sponsors of U.S. Study Abroad," examines discourses alternative to the ones described in the previous chapter to show both possibilities and challenges. Various models are analyzed, including those of the University of Delaware, Smith College, and the Sweet Briar program. The author situates problems related to lack of linguistic competencies that lead to a devaluation of the notion of studying in other places. The chapter analyzes the testimonies of students who went abroad. The experiences related by the students are in clear contrast with the beliefs expounded in part

two of the book. For example, in the dominant discourse the notion of “Grand Tour” is not associated with the psychological and even physical challenges that may be demanded by living in countries with political and social instability. The students also questioned the notion that programs overseas are weak in relation to American ones. Quite often those who did part of the program in a foreign country were better prepared for the job market, given the exposure to actual practice. One can argue that the situation in Europe shows similarities. There is a promotion of exchanges and mobility programs among students and professors. Thus, “all forms of mobility should be explicitly valued as a factor enriching studies at all levels (including research training at the doctoral level), but also improving the career progression of university researchers and staff” (Commission of the European Communities, 2006). However, many major universities are wary of the Bologna Process whose purpose is to create the *European higher education area* by making academic degrees and quality assurance standards more compatible throughout Europe.

Part four of the book, “The Future of Study Abroad,” contains only one chapter entitled “Policy Implications.” The concluding thoughts are applicable not only to the American context but to the European one as well, in particular to the European mobility programs. The quotation from Ben Feinberg included in the text seems very appropriate. It reads: “In our efforts to ensure a ‘safe’ and ‘fun’ study abroad experience (safety, excursions and ‘fun’ group activities, and positive evaluation forms-‘Did you have a good time?’), we forget the true pedagogical objectives of our students” (p.143).

This book provides a good opportunity to think about dominant beliefs regarding studying abroad and expanding enriching opportunities.♣

REFERENCES

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