

# Episode 08

## Dr. Whitney Bendeck

H: Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs! I'm Hannah,

Z: And I'm Zoe! And we are your hosts. On this podcast we'll talk about study abroad from the perspective of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make it an experience worth sharing. We'll also bring you travel tips and fun facts from around the globe.

Z: On today's episode, we'll hear from Dr. Whitney Bendeck, the program leader for our *International Affairs in London* program and one of the program leaders for the *Prague Social Work and International Affairs: Human Rights* program. We'll hear about the benefits of study abroad for both students and faculty, and how a variety of program lengths offers something for everyone!

Z: Thanks for joining us today! Could you go ahead and introduce yourself to our listeners? Just what do you teach and how long have you been at FSU?

Whitney (W): Sure, so I'm Whitney Bendeck, I'm on faculty in International Affairs. I'm a professor there, I'm also the director of our undergraduate program. And I've been at FSU actually a long time, I've taught at FSU since 2005 but I've been with International Affairs since the 2010-2011 academic year.

H: And so we know that you lead two programs for International Programs, one to Prague and one in London. Could you tell us a little bit more about each of those programs?

W: Sure, so I didn't mention what I teach. I teach the Introduction to International Affairs, I also teach on China, I teach on Europe and total war and human rights and so that ties into what I do with my study abroad programs. So one of them is a short Spring Break program, it's one week over Spring Break and that's connected to my Introduction to International Affairs course. So students who take that are in the classroom all semester but over Spring Break we jet over to

London and spend a week really studying International Affairs in practice. The other program I do is a five week program to Prague and that one takes place over the summer, that's a human rights focused program and so for that one we are looking at international human rights and specifically human rights as it pertains to the Holocaust and the break down of Yugoslavia.

H: I've had some student ambassadors who have participated in that program and the response they have to that program is just so incredible to see, just the respect and the reverence for what they learn and get to experience on that program. So I'm curious from a faculty perspective what do you see as the difference between teaching in London, at one of our study center locations, and then in Prague in a non-study center program.

W: They are different and similar in many ways. So in London of course we have the support of the entire faculty and staff that's there at the study center so it's nice that there's actually a building to go to, there's the staff that we are able to interact with and individuals who are able to help us coordinate our program. So that's really nice and very rewarding in the program. As a faculty member it's also very comforting to me to know that if we ever have any issues there's a whole team behind us who are there to help us. In Prague we don't have a study center but we have Eva Illnerova, so she's our program coordinator on the ground and really she plays the role of probably twenty people on the ground and does the same thing. So even though we don't have a headquarters of a building to go to we have her, and she is able to make everything flow just seamlessly on that program.

H: I'm also curious, you mentioned the length of the programs. So your Prague program is five weeks long and your London program is just one week. So how do you see the differences there or do you see any specific benefits to one or the other? Just tell us a little bit about the length of your programs.

W: Sure, so I think having a one week Spring Break program serves a function for students who do not have the time necessarily, to do a long summer program or semester program, maybe because of work, internships. Also it's more cost effective. You have students who really want to have that international experience but just don't see that they can afford the larger program, that gives them the opportunity to have the international experience and do it over a shorter time. We pack in a lot of that week so I've never had students feel like it's short because it feels like we do so much, because honestly we do. Then for the summer program, I mean that gives students the opportunity to really get comfortable in the environment. And we stay in the residential side of Prague so they are able to live like the Czech people actually do. So that allows them really to get more comfortable with their environment, explore more on their own because they do have more free time but also you know same thing, we're packing a lot into that experience academically.

Z: I love that you mention you know they're different and that the spring break program is a great way for students to almost get a taste of what study abroad is like and yet still have that immersive experience and go to some places that are off the beaten path. I've talked to students before who have been on the Spring Break program and it's maybe their first time ever leaving the United States and so that's great and then it sort of sparks that love for International travel.

W: It does, in fact I've had a number of students who have started with me in London and then have gone on the Prague program after that.

Z: Oh that's wonderful. Yeah I've heard of some accounts like that too. So I'm wondering how has teaching abroad impacted you professionally and personally over the years?

W: Sure, so I love to travel so for me it's just a win-win, it allows me to travel. But you never stop learning and for me experiential learning is the best form of learning. Most of us learn more by going and doing and experiencing than we do just having somebody talk to us in the classroom. I'm no different, so being able to go and experience those things myself allows me to continue learning. It gives me the experiences that I can then bring back to the classroom and enhance the classroom. I am able to bring my family with me on some of them so that's really important to me too that I get to have that experience with my family and that the students get to meet my family and get to see a different side of me. Suddenly I'm not just this abstract professor but I'm a human being and they can relate to me on a completely different level as a result of that but that's very rewarding personally for me as well. And then just academically for me too, being able to leave the classroom and turn the location into that learning experience, there's so much more we can do when we're not confined to the classroom but can go and experience and to be able to have that experience with the students and see how the students respond to the location and to the activities. It's just so amazingly rewarding for me.

H: I'm curious, do you think that your experience teaching abroad and having that out of classroom experiences with the students, do you think that that's informed or benefited your teaching here in Tallahassee as well?

W: Absolutely, because like I said I continue to learn and as I experience things it gives me a perspective to take into the classroom that I wouldn't have had, had I not had that experience myself. Even things like the photographs that I'm able to take that I'm then able to bring into my PowerPoint and you know discuss that experience with students so I'm always bringing that back into the classroom. For the International Affairs side of it, it's funny to me sometimes, some of the little things that just kind of click with me, like oh you know I can explain this to the students, using this as an example so I am able to take some of those experiences and then use them as anecdotes in the classroom

H: That's wonderful to hear that professors are also loving to continue to learn and continue to develop in how they can teach students. So we have a final question for you that I still want to ask but, as we've been talking about this I have a secondary question that goes along with it now. So what we really want to ask is what do you think the benefit of studying abroad is for students so keep that in mind, but what I also want to know is what do you think the benefit is for faculty to teach abroad? Through your own experience what advice would you give to both faculty who want to teach abroad and to students who are considering studying abroad.

W: Okay so you might have to ask me the last one again but for students, it gives them the opportunity to learn so much but it's not just that they are learning academically. I think students learn more about themselves than anything else in the process. Many of them are already living in dorms or living in apartments so they've already had that experience of independence but traveling, especially outside of the country, on their own, helps them learn so much about who they are because they have to step outside their comfort zone, they have to learn how to navigate things on their own and quite frankly that can be scary. I know talking to students sometimes they say their biggest fear is when they get over there are they going to have any friends? And yet by the end of the first evening they already have friends and sometimes those are lifelong friends and so those fears that are very natural, are things that they learn to overcome. They learn that they can do more than they ever thought that they were capable of doing and so it just gives them really that empowerment that I think is so important. And then you add to that what they're learning in the classroom which are things that we just can't deliver quite in the same way in Tallahassee but we can on location. So you take the academic side of it with the personal growth side of it. I'll say with Prague too, that program in particular being a human rights program, that one has a life changing impact on students. Nobody is going to come home and say that Auschwitz was the most fun thing that they did but they will say it was the most life changing thing that they did. So they come back a different person, who has learned to think differently. Who has learned to think about things that maybe they grew up with, maybe it's even prejudices or things like that and have a second thought about that because they have seen the impact that that has, how negative that can be so it truly is transformative as an experience for students. So any student who is interested in study abroad I absolutely say do it, it will change their life no matter what experience it is that they're having. It's so worth it. And then for faculty members, I mean, for me it's one of those things that keeps the job interesting. You know we can get into a rut that we're teaching the same classes, we're kind of doing the

same thing. But when you do study abroad things are always changing. You're always having new opportunities, new experiences, it's so worthwhile. As I said, it gives you so much more to bring into the classroom and I think that's important so it's kind of like instead of having to go to training classes, you know, you're just doing that naturally by experiencing things yourself. And then the other thing I would say about that is that one of the most rewarding things I have for me is the experience that I have with students. Because here at FSU there's a limit to the relationship that I have with students. You know, we're in the classroom and that's pretty much it. In study abroad I get to know them on such a different level, they get to know me on such a different level, and it creates such a unique bond between professor and student where we see each other differently. We're not just in the classroom, we're staying in the same hotel or apartment building, we're traveling together, we're having meals together. Like I said, when they see me with my family they see a different side of me. I'm dressed like them, you know little things like that but it just creates a really unique relationship that is so special to me. Those students hold a very special place in my heart. It also for them can be very good because they go on, they need things like letters of recommendation and they have a professor who knows them really well.

H: Absolutely, thank you so much for sharing all of that and I'm sure that's some great advice that some students and some faculty members alike will appreciate hearing.

Z: Well that's all the questions we have for you, thank you so much for talking with us today and it's always a pleasure talking to you.

W: Well thank you so much, I'm glad to do it and I hope somebody is inspired to go and study abroad!

Z: Before we disembark, we want to talk about IP's different types of programs.

As Whitney mentioned, IP has programs of varying lengths in different locations around the globe. International Programs offers week-long spring break programs, programs which span multiple weeks over the summer, as well as semester-long, and year-long programs over the fall, spring, and summer semesters. These varying lengths allow students to pick a program that works for them and their schedules.

H: Some programs are curriculum-focused and others are more broad in their course offerings. Curriculum-focused programs allow you to take courses related to a major or to a minor. During a broad curriculum program you can take courses everyone needs to graduate, like humanities and liberal studies courses. Or, if you're looking to gain work experience before you graduate or have already completed a lot of credits, you could participate in an international internship!

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Tune in next week for an interview with Ali Jones, a First Year Abroad student who came home early due to COVID-19. Despite having to come home early, here's what Ali has to say about her time abroad:

Ali: Living abroad was actually awesome, like it's probably the best experience of my entire life

Z: Thanks again to Dr. Bendeck for talking with us and to each of you for listening!

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